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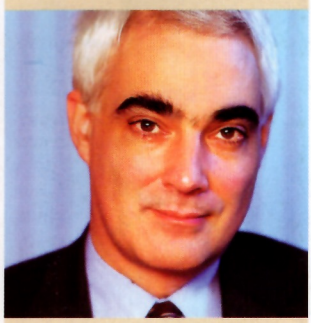
THIS WEEK



Darling's way

Transport secretary looks to 'third way' for Quality Partnerships **page 4**

Think tank

Tour operators reveal their visions for the future of the market – and we were there **page 18**

Digitachs

Are you ready for the digital revolution? CBW explains all... **page 24**

Where now?

The bus industry's leading lights deliver their verdict **page 28**

Hello Yellow

60 extra schoolbuses for West Yorkshire as yellow buses get Government seal of approval **page 6**

NEW! Minibus magazine inside

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Middle of the road

Nursing an ever-so-slight hangover on Friday morning, I felt reflective enough to examine what Alistair Darling said at the annual CPT dinner last Thursday.

It was an interesting evening, made all the more interesting by Phil White's inaugural speech as incoming president of the Confederation of Passenger Transport. In some areas, his speech was good deal more entertaining than the celebrity comedienne...

Mr White paid fitting tribute to Mr Darling for his relative longevity as Secretary of State for Transport - a job historically considerably less secure than bus driving. But along with his longevity came a feeling of déjà vu when Mr Darling spoke.

Although he's always articulate, in common with most politicians he's restricted to going over some old ground, such that sifting the substance from familiar words is akin to locating the chicken in a chip shop pie. Once again, what he said about Quality Partnerships gave the best clues to Government thinking.

In essence, he said he was worried about the current competition law as it applies to fares and timetabling, which in some circumstances works against local authorities reaching an agreement with operators. Local government needs more control of the situation, he said.

The good news is that he emphatically said that Quality Contracts are still a last resort, but reading between the lines, I think he's trying to steer a middle path between the two... a theme explored at the conference reported in this issue.

It will be a neat trick if he can pull it off, but if ever there were need for the CPT to have a hand on the steering wheel, this is the moment....

P.S. As I hope you've noticed, this week's *CBW* has a new look and some additional pages in the shape of our new *Minibus* supplement. The coming weeks will see even more improvements at *Coach and Bus Week* as we add more content and pages to Britain's favourite industry magazine. Watch this space!

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
Editor

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Darling to look for 'middle way' on contracts

Transport Secretary wants to remove Competition Act hurdles

SECRETARY of State for Transport Alistair Darling MP told members of the Confederation of Passenger Transport that a 'third way' for Quality Partnerships could resolve the row over franchising.

Speaking the the CPT Annual Dinner at the Park Lane Hilton in London, Mr Darling said he wanted to eliminate the barrier of competition law which has prevented agreement on many statutory partnerships, but said he wanted to find a 'better alternative to a Quality Contract.'

Explaining how the Transport Innovation Fund is to be grown to £10bn by 2015, following a DfT announcement that morning, Mr Darling said the fund would be aimed at resolving cross-boundary issues, and taking a holistic approach to transport planning.

"...when you travel by bus or car, you don't care who owns the bit of road you're on or who owns the bus. You just want to get there on time," he said. "And decisions on road, rail, bus and tram need to be looked at together by the same people, so that they can make sensible choices and decide on their priorities.

"It happens in London with Transport for London, and now in Scotland. We can learn from the experience and build on it... planning and delivery together."

Mr Darling gave a big shove to road pricing, saying that the DfT is to pilot a 'major road pricing scheme' first within the next four to five years: "But moving to a national system of road pricing couldn't happen overnight. Such a scheme would be a huge and complex task," he added.

The CPT afterwards said the speech gave little away, but said the 'third way' suggestion for Quality Partnerships is something it would support in the right circumstances: "Where there is an effective scheme, many sections of the industry would consider seeing greater council control," said a CPT spokesman. "The CPT has always had an open mind on this."

The CPT said that Mr Darling's comments about competition law underlined its own thoughts on the matter.

"It just confirms what we've been saying for years about competition law working against the interests of passengers," said the spokesman. "Our concern is that the OFT is notoriously not inclined to compromise."

Denis Wormwell, the former National Express Coach MD now heading up bus operations in the West Midlands, Dundee and London, told *CBW* he thought the speech caused no alarm: "In fact I think it was reassuring about Quality Partnerships," he said.

CPT president calls for industry to take the lead

NEW CPT president Phil White, chief executive of National Express Group, used his inaugural speech to lambaste operators for not leading by example.

Mr White said Quality Bus Partnerships work, but operators should not sit around waiting for something to happen. "I firmly believe that we, the operators, should lead by example - we shouldn't let or expect other people to do this for us," he said.

"Whilst we've achieved a lot on our own, it's important that we work closely with our partners to keep one step ahead of the game," he said. "Where we've worked in partnership with our stakeholders, for example in Cambridge, Bristol and Lancashire, making better use of road space, we put on a better service and, lo and behold, our customers like it and want to travel with us again and again."

CPT president Phil White

Mr White said that the industry is good, but not perfect, and shouldn't point the finger of blame at other issues: "In a few places so far we've been given the benefit of the doubt. We have to raise our game when things aren't working."

Mr White paid tribute to the 'Cinderella' coach industry, pointing out that the 2,000 coaches required for the Olympics may be hard to find if the legislative maze continues: "It is now, more than ever, that coaches need a break."

Speaking of coaching he said: "It is a sector relied on by many older and less affluent people, and is dominated by small family businesses with narrow margins and tight balance sheets, who are held back by having to manage and absorb the current tide of regulation, particularly from Europe. We at CPT need to help them."

DfT announces extra funding

THE Government is to offer £10 billion by 2015 to support road pricing, traffic priority, Quality Partnerships and transport schemes which contribute to the economy.

Launched in 2004, the Transport Innovation Fund is to get extra cash to pump-prime local authority projects, said Secretary of State for Transport, Alistair Darling MP. Announced on the eve of the CPT's Annual Dinner, parameters for applying for grants have now been published.

In November, the Government made a £7m award to seven local authority areas to mount feasibility studies, Mr Darling told the Commons.

The new guidance explains how local authorities can "enter into a partnership with the Department [for Transport] to develop their proposals," he said.

"For schemes to tackle congestion, some local authorities may wish to bid for TIF funding to, amongst other things, support bus schemes. Such authorities will want to be reassured that there are suitable mechanisms for involving private operators," he added.

Dunn Line has completed its move from its Basford base, with the purchase of three new depots, still in the Nottingham area. Two new sites are at Heanor Gate Industrial Estate and include transport yards, workshops and offices over a total area of 1.4 acres. The third site is on Beechdale Road in Nottingham and comprises a yard, workshop and offices on a 2.4 acre site. The company sold 70% of the Basford depot last November for a total of £1.64m. It arranged to lease the remaining 30% back until June 2006 and repaid the outstanding mortgage with the proceeds. The surplus on the deal was £590,000. Total investment for the new sites will be £1,345,000. Dunn Line says the Heanor sites will open up new routes into Derbyshire, and Beechdale Road will house the remainder of the Nottingham operation, along with the head office.

Derby's city centre bus station will not re-open

Derby station to remain closed

Derby City Council has ruled out re-opening its central bus station, following a failed motion from opposition parties.

It was closed last October, and moved to temporary stops, until the £90m Riverlights project - which was to house a state-of-the-art bus station - was completed. But financial trouble for the developer - Metro Holst - has put the scheme in doubt. Campaigners are unhappy that the old Art Deco building is being demolished and have been staging a roof-top demonstration there ever since.

Arriva on a selling spree

Arriva the Shires is seeking a buyer for its coaching unit at Garston near Watford. This comes on top of the company's decision to close Leaside Travel, its coach business in nearby north London, in September.

The Shires unit has a PVR of 15 and operates school and college contracts in the area.

Brian Drury, commercial director for Arriva the Shires and Essex, says, "Arriva's core business is operating commercial bus services and contracted services for TfL and local authorities. To concentrate on this core work, we are looking for buyers for our coaching division based in Watford."

Mike Cooper, managing director of Arriva UK Regions, says, "Disposing of the two coaching companies is a coincidence and does not mean we are reviewing our coaching interests."

■ Arriva has also announced the sale of its car and commercial vehicle retail division, Arriva Vehicle Rental, to Northgate plc for £129m. Bob Davies, Arriva chief executive, said: 'The sale is at the right price and the right time. It enables us to focus even more strongly on developing our passenger services businesses."

Briefly

■ **Channel 4 News presenter Jon Snow will present the London Transport Awards at a ceremony in London on Tuesday 4 April. Karen Buck MP, parliamentary under secretary of state for Transport, will give the welcome address, with the after dinner speech given by broadcaster John Sergeant. For more information see *www.rgu.ac.uk*.**

■ **The deputy leader of Birmingham City Council says declining bus patronage in the city will never be reversed until drug problems on buses are sorted out. He says TWM route 50 has an appalling reputation and is known locally as the 'marijuana express'. TWM says it actively tackles crime and has arrested 800 people for a variety of offences, including drugs, since the start of its Operation Safer Travel.**

■ **The Coach Holiday Conference 2006, a joint venture between the CTC and the Bonded Coach Holiday Group (BCHG), will take place in Llandudno from 7-9 April. The conference will be on Friday 7, followed by the CTC AGM and the Coach Holiday workshop on the Saturday. There are also dinners, trips and a golf tournament arranged around these activities. For more details see *www.bondedcoachholidays.co.uk***

■ **Arriva North West and Wales is giving loved-up passengers a novel opportunity to declare their romantic feelings on Valentine's Day. The company will display A5 sized posters of the best messages phoned in to its team by February 3.**

Yellow bus boost for Yorkshire

60 new schoolbuses after transport minister's visit

By Andrew Jarosz, CBW correspondent

SIXTY more yellow buses will be heading for West Yorkshire from September, thanks to a further £7m of Department for Transport funding confirmed this week. The announcement comes after transport minister Karen Buck visited Metro, the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive last week.

This new authorisation will bring the total number of yellow buses in the county to 150 – with industry insiders saying that competition will be intense from manufacturers excluded this time round. The 70 buses already in the county (the remaining 20 will be delivered shortly) were supplied exclusively by BMC.

Transport Minister Karen Buck travelled on a yellow bus and met some pupils from St Theresa's Primary School last Thursday. "'My bus' is obviously having a real impact on local congestion wherever Metro has introduced the scheme," she said. "When I met them, the children left me with no doubt that they love their yellow bus. They also told me their mums and dads like the yellow bus because it saved them time in the mornings and afternoons, and that their teachers liked the fact they arrived on time and were better behaved in class."

West Yorkshire Metro first floated the idea of introducing yellow buses three years ago, having used two American-built Bluebird buses in Halifax. The whole "My Bus" concept of home to school transport evolved into a package costing £18.7m, where Metro supplies vehicles to operators who use specially trained drivers to serve clusters of schools.

In November 2004, Metro introduced the first of 30 high-floor BMC school buses. It modified its specification last year to feature the low-floor BMC Condor buses, costing £115k each. Despite suggestions that the original buses were to be replaced, these have soldiered on. Other manufacturers are said to be keen to offer an improved competitive product at a bargain price.

Sixty of the new low-floor, Condor buses, which are fitted with high-backed padded seats with seatbelts, additional safety exits and CCTV, are being introduced to around 100 schools serving around 4,000 pupils, bringing the total number of pupils traveling to 6,000.

Figures from the first two phases of the scheme show that the average shift from car use has been over 60%, with one school in Brighouse showing a shift as high as 91%. A primary school in Bradford reported a 30% reduction in cars outside the school gate, and of those pupils now using the yellow bus, over 60% previously travelled by car.

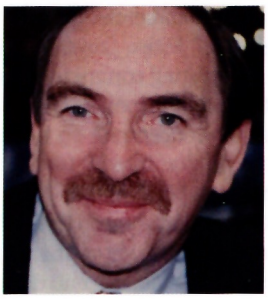
One of the new BMC arrivals in West Yorkshire. 60 more yellow buses will soon be joining it

Cerberus emerges as NABI buyer

An American venture capital company has emerged as the buyer of North American Bus Industries (NABI), the former parent company of Optare.

NABI will be consolidated around its American holdings. Russell Richardson, a director of NABI and previous owner of Optare, is closing down the company's operations in Hungary.

Cerberus Capital Management, a New York-based investment company, bought the former Optare parent last week for $2m, and assumed $81m of debt. Cerberus plans to stabilize the company, which employs 400 people in its Anniston, Alabama, plant, and is America's third-largest bus builder.



Russell Richardson

A statement from the company says much of the debts accrued by the Hungarian parent company had been caused by unfavourable currency exchange rates.

Cerberus is said to have an investment portfolio of $16bn and significant expertise in reforming distressed companies. Its immediate action has been to centralise the business on Anniston and to close and sell the Hungarian facility. The company believes there is a long term future for public transport as fuel prices can only increase and the growth in urban development is sustained.

NABI director Russell Richardson told *CBW* he would be spending the next two or three months winding up affairs in Hungary. "This is not such a simple exercise as it sounds," he explained.

"It's the first time there has ever been a sell-off of what was essentially a state-owned company in Hungary. There may be all sorts of unexpected repercussions ."

VDL is reflecting on a successful 2005

Record year for VDL

VDL Bus and Coach is reporting 2005 as a record year: turnover leapt nearly 45%, two thirds of which the company says is down to organic growth.

Profits were also up, but the company declines to put a figure on the increase.

Turnover at the Bus and Coach division - which includes coaches, chassis modules, public transport buses, mini and midi buses - leapt from €395m to €568m.

The company delivered 1,743 coaches and buses last year in addition to 1,240 chassis modules, 40% of which went to other constructors. The company also made 370 mini/midibuses. This puts VDL's market share at 8% in Europe, making it the sixth biggest constructor.

For 2006, the company says the outlook is good although the order portfolio is slightly smaller than last year. For the Group as a whole, the company says prospects are "predominantly positive", despite increased price pressure and "considerable" competition from Eastern Europe. Combined turnover rose from €917m in 2004 to €1.156bn in 2005, an increase of more than 25%.

MARCOPOLO, the world's largest bodybuilder, has delivered 22 of its Senior microbuses to Consettur Machupicchu AC, a travel consortium based in Peru's Cusco City. The buses replace outdated vehicles currently used to transport around 1,200 tourists per day on the 8km trip from Machu Picchu Vila to the Sanctuary at Aguas Calientes. The new vehicles were blessed in a traditional Peruvian ceremony.

Road news

St Albans

St Albans town planners and its building company Mouchel Parkman are under pressure following a report on the city centre redevelopment. Costs have escalated from £1.8m to £5.2m, including a jump in consultation fees from £300,000 to £1.4m. The redevelopment work, which includes bus-friendly kerbing, priority lanes and new stops, restarts this week and the main street will be closed for a further eight weeks.

Huddersfield

COSTAIN Civil Engineering has been criticised by Huddersfield councillors following overruns on improvement works to the bus corridor in the town. The £2m project over-ran for 15 weeks and cost £200,000 more than originally planned.

Denton

GMPTE has started a consultation on improvements to the A57 Manchester-Hyde quality bus corridor through Denton. The proposal is for a 24 hour bus lane along sections of Manchester Road North, and a peak time bus lane along sections of Manchester Road South.

Roads report

The Conservative party says that since the Government announced a £1.4bn scheme for road improvements in 1998, at least 25 road improvement schemes have not begun construction by their target dates. Transport secretary Alistair Darling said: "We cannot just build more roads. It is not possible and it's not environmentally acceptable."

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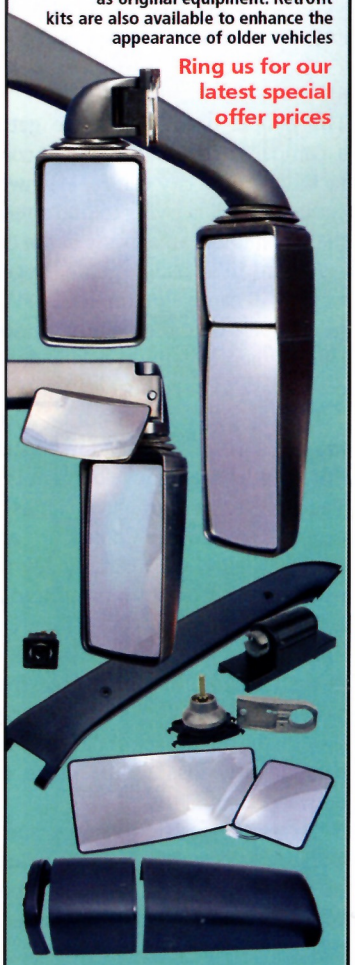

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Coventry battles to win back tourists

Residents rally as visitors to historic cathedral plummet due to lack of coach parking facilities

The people of Coventry are getting behind a campaign to provide better coach parking facilities in the city centre. Meanwhile the city council says it is trying to find alternatives, but that no suitable area exists in the city centre.

A local blue badge guide, Roger Bailey, is waging a campaign on local TV, radio and newspapers over the issue. Over 500 residents have signed a petition asking for a previous coach park to be re-opened.

Touring coaches will not be allowed to use the city's main Pool Meadow bus station after this month as its redevelopment is completed. The only other parking facilities in the city centre - next to the Cathedral - are routinely filled, illegally, with cars. Bailey says he has witnessed coaches turning around and leaving without stopping because they cannot park. The tourism authorities says visitor numbers at the Cathedral have dropped from 275,000 to below 150,000 in 2004, a large part of which they blame on the lack of parking. Campaigners estimate the loss to the city's economy at between £2.5- £5m.

"It is a massive problem and is getting worse," he says. "Coventry is a fantastic place to visit but this is having a major impact because there's a lot of other tourist attractions around."

"People can always find alternatives because coaches can turn around and find somewhere else that will want them. We need a dedicated quality coach parking facility as soon as possible."

"I have seen a definite drop in the number of enquiries. This is a serious issue, there's no doubt about that."

"If you do not provide parking facilities for coaches, where will they go? It can only result in a loss of visitors for the city."

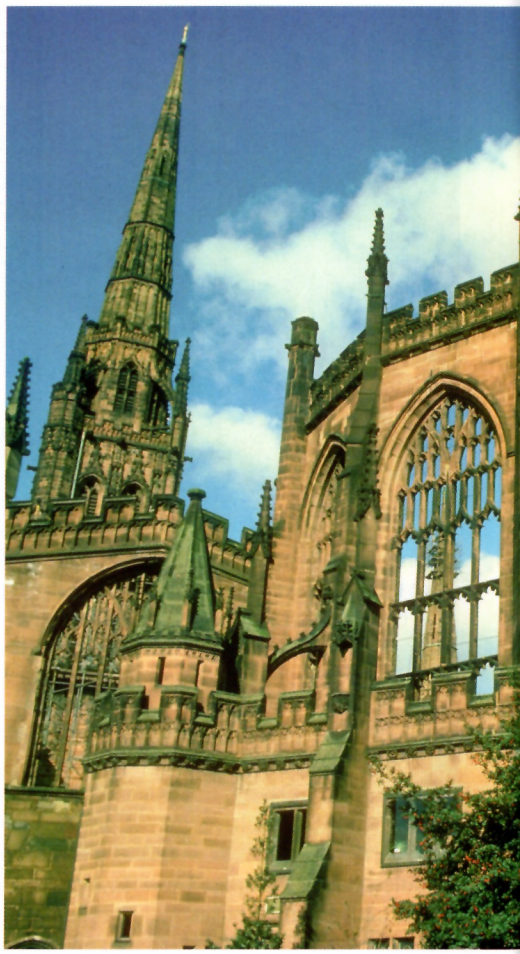
A specialist coach park in White Street in the city centre was closed down three years ago due to repeated vandalism attacks and access problems. It is now used for public car parking. Members of the Coventry and Warwickshire Access Transport Committee have started a public petition to re-open the car park to coaches, and have already collected more than 500 signatures.

The chair of the committee Rita Norman says it is vital for the local economy to have a dedicated coach park. She says, "People are very concerned. We feel having a coach park is very important because it brings trade into the city. That's why we set up the petition.

"White Street should never have been closed. It should have been cleaned up and made safer."

"We would like to combine the bus station with the coach park so it is all one."

The committee is planning to present the petition to council members at the end of February. Limited coach parking spaces are also available at the Ricoh Stadium in the north of the city. The CPTs parking consultant, and fellow blue badge guide Bob Pilbeam, says he is aware of the problem and is awaiting a response from the council.



Fewer coach trips are visiting Coventry Cathedral

Travel West Midlands started its first National Express contract last Saturday, taking over from Flights of Birmingham. The route runs from Wolverhampton to Gatwick and Heathrow. The company will use ten Scania Irizar PB coaches, based at TWM's Brimingham Central depot. 'A number' of ex-Flights drivers have joined the team. TWM says the contract gives them a platform to tender for further National express diagrams.

Town's anger over coach parking

Traders and councillors are at logger-heads in the picturesque Leicestershire market town of Market Harborough over coach parking.

Nearly 60 tourists were turned away from the town last week because there was nowhere for their buses to park. The day-trippers - from Derby - were hoping to stop for two hours in the historic town that councillors plan to promote as a tourist centre for the Olympics. But the buses had to drive off after being told there was no facility for long-term parking.

An angry Chamber of Trade spokesman, Malcolm Levey-Jones said; "If councillors want to make Harborough a tourist centre - and that's a very good idea - they need to get some common-sense and introduce parking for coaches."

A stall-holder in the town's Market Hall, which is famous for its local food produce, said;" I've had a stall here for eight years and

Parking is at a premium in Market Harborough

there used to be a lot of coach parties here when they could find somewhere to park. We certainly need to the extra business, and this is holding the town back."

But Harborough District Council's car parks chief Warren Griffiths defended the move, saying the town centre was far too small to accommodate coaches stopping long-term outside the Market Hall.

Keith Payne, a member of the Confederation of Passenger Transport said the problem was a national one, but - he added - he would be raising the Harborough problem at a future meeting.

Survey cheers Warrington staff

Warrington Borough Transport says staff morale and investment targeting have both been improved by the results of its first ever passenger survey.

Despite problems with infrastructure in the north western town, Warrington is encouraged that the results of the survey showed a high level of satisfaction.

88% of respondents say they were satisfied or better with Warrington's service. Respondents who feel the service is improving out numbered those who feel it is getting worse by 3 to 1.

"The passengers are the best judge of the service we are offering," says managing director Nigel Featham. "The plan is to do this every year and track the improvements in our service. This process is good for management and staff, it is motivating to see their efforts reflected in the outcome. It's a simple prioritisation tool as well for highlighting priorities."

The survey threw up two issues over which passengers felt particularly strongly: real time information and bus stop vandalism.

Ridership declined heavily during the 1990s in the area, arrested says Featham by a combination of investment in the fleet, reliability and staff training. The company has now enjoyed small but steady growth over the last five years - except from last year when ridership was hit by road works in the town centre and being forced to use a temporary bus station. However, the new station opens this year, and the shopping centre will have doubled in size.

The survey was undertaken by bus industry market research firm Best Chart.

88% of those surveyed in Warrington were happy

Briefly

First Airlink, based in Doncaster, has carried its 150,000th customer. Since starting in April 2005, passenger numbers have grown by over 60% from 2,500 per week, to over 4,000 now. It runs Monday to Saturday at three buses per hour. First gave the 150,000th customer a month's free travel.

A 55-year-old male pedestrian was killed after a collision with a National Express coach last Friday. The accident, on the A466 at Chepstow, Monmouthshire, closed the road for four hours. Police say no cause has yet been established.

Merseytravel has published plans for a £1.5m upgrade of the bus and rail interchange at the James Street station in Liverpool. Bus shelters will be redesigned to blend in with a new canopy over the station entrance, and signage and access to the building will be improved. The plans will be on display at Merseytravel's head office in Hatton Garden until March 3.

IRELAND

ESRI call for end to CIE monopoly

Reports says big firms given no incentive to make savings

A new report published by the ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute) has called for an end to the near monopoly that CIE has on bus services, which it says leads to inefficiency and poor service provision.

The report "A Review of the Regulatory Environment for Bus Transport in Ireland" by Competition Authority executive Anne Ribault-O'Reilly says that the present system gives Bus Eireann and Dublin Bus no incentive to make savings on loss-making routes or to expand business on profitable ones.

"The companies may be missing more worthwhile investment and innovation to subsidise loss-making routes," she says.

Subsidies should be allocated by the Government after an open competition for exclusive temporary contracts on the agreed routes and services, the report argues.

Noting a relaxation of the licensing rules for long distance services in 2001, the report argues that further change is needed.

"The licensing regime remains restrictive, which leads to inefficiencies," the report continues, "the market structure is at best oligopolistic, with no threat of entry. As a result, operators can charge higher prices than those that would prevail with a free entry regime. Some operators may settle for a quiet life, with less incentive to reduce their cost base, improve quality of service and innovate than if they constantly faced the threat of entry."

The report says rules on competition need to change

The report notes that passengers in rural or isolated areas not served by the CIE companies lose out in the provision of socially necessary services, as the state run companies are treated differently to private operators. "Private operators providing socially desirable services - typically rural bus services in low density areas (e.g. Lough Swilly in Donegal) cannot receive state subsidies. The scale of their operation as well as the duality and price of the service offered are limited by their profitability constraint. This situation is not faced by rural dwellers served by Bus Eireann as the company can use a portion of its operational subsidy, or cross-subsidise the service from profitable routes"

The report, published in the new ESRI quarterly commentary, also notes that 80 percent of school bus runs are contracted out by Bus Eireann to private operators with "no guarantee that the school services are offered at the lowest possible cost to the Exchequer", and recommends that the Department of Transport lose its dual role as owner of CIE and regulator/policy-maker for bus services.

Ms. O'Reilly concludes that inter-city routes should be open to any bus operator who satisfies minimum safety requirements. "Such changes are critical because buses will remain the main player in the delivery of public transport," she says.

€250,000 of unclaimed fares to charity

Bus Atha Cliath has launched its 2006 Community Support Programme, which will see the operator donating over €250,000 to local charities, community organisations, schools and sport projects across Dublin. The grants for the programme are being funded from long-term unclaimed bus change receipts. This is the third year for the hugely successful grant scheme and so far over 300 groups have received €500,000 from the Dublin Bus Community Support Programme.

Dublin Bus operates an "Exact Fare" system across its 1100-strong fleet, but is unique in major operators in providing a "change receipt" to passengers who overpay. The receipts can be exchanged for cash at the company's head office, but due to the small value of the individual amounts involved, a large number are never reclaimed, and after a period of time the money held in reserve is distributed via the Community Support Programme.

Dublin Bus is donating €250,000 to local charities

Speaking at the launch Niall Quinn, former Irish International footballer and patron of the Dublin Bus Community Support Programme said, "This programme is aimed at the small local groups and organisations that are trying to make a difference in their community and is proving really popular.

"I have visited a number of the charities who have received money from Dublin Bus and it has made a huge difference to them and I'm delighted that Dublin Bus is committed to continuing this programme."

CIE Chairman, Dr John Lynch added, "I would like to invite organisations which have operations in the Dublin area and who are involved with sport, children and youth, people with disabilities, the elderly and the environment to apply to us. We will have advertisements on our buses, in bus shelters, in local newspapers and on our website *www.dublinbus.ie* letting people know how to apply.

The grants will range from €1,000 up to €5,000 and we hope to help as many groups as we can".

The future of departures

has arrived

It's all change at Heathrow Airport Central Bus Station

National Express and BAA have invested over £2 million to make Heathrow Central Bus Station (CBS) a much better place to catch a bus or coach and also a much nicer environment to work in.

CBS has been reinvented as an inspired piece of architecture and it looks sensational. For a start it has a roof, a triple-storey inflatable roof designed by top world balloonist Per Lindstrand. 8 million users will find bus and coach travel has suddenly moved into a new era. There are real time on-screen updates of arriving and departing services, automated and staffed ticket machines and information points, along with creature comforts like newspapers, snacks and fresh coffee. National Express is proud to be running the world's most advanced bus and coach station. Because we're not just driving coaches these days we're driving a vision.

The new Heathrow Central Bus Station is now open

I would like to say thank you to all those at National Express, BAA, D5 and Mansells who worked extremely hard to bring this build to fruition.

Marc Sangster, Marketing & Strategy Director, National Express Ltd

NationalExpress

BAA Heathrow

Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our new round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk

CCTV on Nexus' Metro network was so effective, it's now in demand for bus stops

NORTH EAST

Security on **Nexus'** lightrail Metro network in Tyne and Wear was improved by the use of better lighting, landscaping and CCTV - so now the PTE is on the lookout for a designer who can do the same thing for its bus stops. Despite its budgetary woes, the North-East transport executive is currently advertising for the post, which will pay £29,000 a year.

A group of North East MPs are calling on government to extend the concessionary fare scheme across the region, rather than restrict it to authority areas as it is now. Pensioners in the Nexus area will travel fairly freely, but those elsewhere will have to pay to cross authority boundaries - made worse if the current half-price offer to pensioners is cut to help fund the bigger scheme. Berwick MP **Alan Beith** says, "I don't think the government thought this policy through before they announced it. Having a regional scheme would be a lot more help to people in Northumberland, and if by pooling resources we can get nearer to that, then we should be doing it." The government says extending the scheme would cost an extra £100m.

MIDLANDS

TWM in Birmingham drivers rejected a consultative ballot on a pay deal by a margin a four to one last week, meaning a ballot on full strike action is now on the cards. The deal was to see the basic salary move to £7.10/ hour from £6.60/ hour by 1 January 2008. Around two-thirds of drivers voted. TWM reportedly says it is only willing to "repackage resources already on the table".

Travel West Midlands drivers are set to strike over pay

Nottinghamshire County Council has announced that its concessionary fares scheme will extend across the whole county, and into neighbouring ones, when the scheme starts in April.

Holmes Group Travel in Newport, Shropshire, has been hit by another vandal attack - two years to the month since suffering a similar incident. The thieves smashed windows and stole radios from two coaches, ripping the dashboards apart and cutting wiring in the process. A further vehicle is off the road after the thieves broke a power door. The material damage is estimated at nearly £5,000, but lost work on the coaches will see that figure increase. The radios were worth around £350 each. Owner **Steve Holmes** says he cannot stay in his present yard and is appealing for owners of secure premises in the area to contact him. Phone 01952 820477.

Staffordshire will offer free 24-hour travel throughout most of the county when the concessionary travel scheme is introduced in April.

In Stoke-on-Trent the scheme is expected to boost passenger numbers by up to 10,000 a day. Currently 30,000 elderly people in Stoke qualify for half price travel.

But the projected increase has sparked more controversy in the city already riven with rows over the bus service with elderly passengers saying gaps in the service and low frequency will mean them having to pay taxi fares to get them home if they take full advantage of the scheme.

Paul de Santis, commercial director for **First PMT** says, "We expect a significant increase in usage.

"We are hoping we might fill up some of the off-peak buses, which at the moment are travelling around with fewer people."

World

Eight people were killed and 40 injured when a coach left the road and turned over in Sweden at the weekend. Reports say there were 51 people on-board the two year old Volvo at the time. Every seat was fitted with belts.

A school district in Arizona has solved its driver shortage problem by offering existing drivers $200 for referring potential recruits who stay for 30 days. A further $200 is on offer if the driver is still employed after six months. So far, eight drivers have taken advantage of the offer.

NORTH

GMPTA is to give three disabled voluntary organisations in the Greater Manchester region £120,000 towards travel training schemes. The programme aims to build the skills and confidence needed to use public transport, and will initially last for twelve months.

Support will vary from one-off familiarisation to long term one-to-one personalised training.

An award-winning bus driver from Cheshire retired last Friday - but not before blasting his old bosses for cutting his favourite route. Ex-Arriva North West and Wales driver **Dave Barrass** - who was voted local Bus Idol by passengers in 2005 - left his job partly because the company cut his 39 service between Middlewich and Northwich at the

end of last year. He reportedly said, "I've worked for the company for 22 years and I felt I didn't have to put up with this. I'll miss it, but the last few weeks have convinced me its time to go. On the bright side I have had some great times and now I'll have the chance to watch my grandchildren grow up." A passenger - one of forty who helped him celebrate his Bus Idol win - was quoted as saying, "We will miss him tremendously - he always guarded passenger welfare and we wish him the best."

WALES

The Welsh arm of Bus Users UK has organised a 'Bobbies-on-Buses' scheme in the north of the country. **Pat's Coaches** of Wrexham, **Bryn Melyn** in Llangollen and **Vale** of Llangolen Travel have signed up to the project which will see uniformed officers travelling for free. **Arriva North West and Wales** is also involved, but already offers a similar service. **Leo Markham**, Bus Users UK officer for Wales, says, "The cost to bus operators of anti-social behaviour is enormous, but it is the bus user who ultimately pays the cost with higher fares. We see this scheme as the start of better cooperation between police and operators which will ultimately benefit everybody.

Uniformed officers will get free rides in North Wales

SOUTH WEST

Stagecoach in Exeter has been hit by a fake ticket scam. Rolls were stolen from buses parked up overnight at the firm's depot in the city. The thieves then printed them themselves and have been selling and using them all over the network. Stagecoach has alerted its drivers to be doubly careful when accepting tickets and has called on the public to help look out for them.

The South West Public Transport Users' Forum has blasted **First Devon and Cornwall** for increasing fares by 20%. The change took effect on January 22. A spokesman said: "These latest increases are an unacceptable New Year's present from a company which we believe delivered a poor service in Cornwall in 2005."

Gerald Taylor - First MD in the region - says the rises are caused by fuel and insurance increases - the latter by 89% in five years he says.

SOUTH EAST

A **Provence Private Hire** (PPH) coach on a school contract skidded off the road and into a ditch last Thursday following a collision with an estate car. None of the ten pupils on board, from a local St Albans school, or the driver, were injured. The driver of the car had to be cut free, but was discharged later from hospital. No cause for the accident - which happened in clear weather - has yet been established

EAST

Dial-a-Ride Lincolnshire reports a very successful 2005 - the 14 **Translinc** supplied-and-run accessible minibuses completed over 41,000 bookings. At a meeting in mid-January, driver **Fred Dawling** from Gainsborough was awarded Best Driver of the Year while **Steve Marshall** of Skegness and **Jim Conroy** of Spalding were given runners-up prizes. Lincolnshire has a higher than average disability rate and a rural spread of one person per hectare - 30% of people live in settlements of less than 3,000, and 19% are elderly or disabled.

2005 was a very successful year for Dial-a-Ride and its Translinc minibuses

World

The inquest into the death of an English boy with learning difficulties killed by a coach while on a holiday in France in 2001 has been convened in Swansea. The inquest heard that the boy, who suffered from a rare condition that left him with no sense of danger, was reversed over when his carer went for a toilet break. The Crown Prosecution Service investigated the accident but did not bring any charges. The inquest continues.

A series of fires on Stagecoach-owned MAN buses in New Zealand have left investigators bewildered. Initial reports suggested the fires were caused by diesel leaks, but a Fire Service investigation has laid the blame on an electrical fault at the rear of one vehicle, and faulty wiring at the front on another. Unions are calling for both types to be withdrawn until the cause is pinpointed.

Events

February 28: Reducing Crime on Public Transport Conference, Earls Court One, London. CBW media partner. Contact 020 7324 4330, *www.neilstewartassociates.co./li226* for registration, or fax 0207 490 8830

March 1-2: British Travel Trade Fair, NEC Birmingham. *www.britishtraveltradefair.com*

March 8-9: Moving On Conference, Crown Plaza Hotel, Glasgow, *www.moving-on-conference.co.uk*, or tel: 0191 241 4523

March 9: Transport and Economic Development in Wales, Marriott Hotel, Cardiff. 0207 787 1210, *www.thewaterfront.co.uk*

April 4: London Transport Awards Dinner, London Hilton. 01224 263134

April 6-7: 30th UK Transport Conference and Exhibition:'Wasted Miles, Wasted Money'. University of Nottingham. Phone CICC: 01223 881622 or *annachapman@CICC-conferences.org.uk*

April 7-9: Coach Tourism Council/ Bonded Coach Holidays Conference 2006, Llandudno, North Wales. 0870 850 2839 or email *admin@coachtourismcouncil.co.uk*

April 24-26: CPT Scotland Annual Conference, Gleneagles. Gail Hume 0131 272 2150, email: *gailhume@cpt-uk.freeserve.co.uk*

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The Genuine Alternative

Plaxton ready to unveil Centro

Plaxton has invited the press to its base in Scarborough next week, ostensibly to show off a new factory. But in reality the company will unveil the much anticipated Centro - the company's first full size bus since it emerged from the Transbus fiasco in 2004.

Interest in the new vehicle has been running high since it was announced in May last year. Originally scheduled for launch in October, development was delayed slightly while the firm concentrated on its Primo midibus, but resumed after that vehicle's successful launch in September. The firm had forty orders before the design was fully off the drawing board.

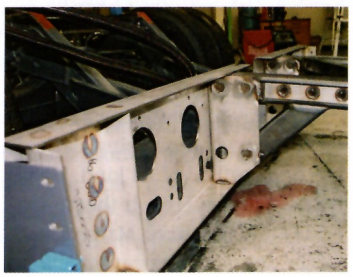
Plaxton is not entirely luring the press to Scarborough under false pretences - Centro will be built at the new factory, which will be seen for the first time. The firm has taken on the vacant facility next to its coachbuilding plant, where it used to build the Pointer.

Centro will initially be available on the VDL Bus SB120 underframe, carrying up to 61 passengers in a 10.7m body (with a 10.2m option for London). Shortly after, Plaxton will release a 12m version on a MAN 14.220 chassis, with space for 42 seats plus standees. Both versions will be 2.5m wide.

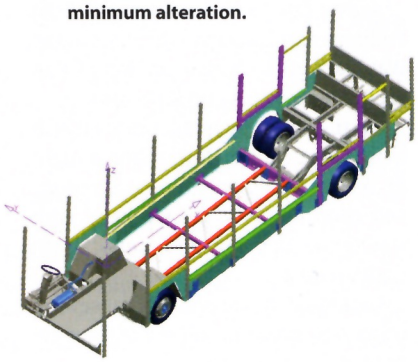
The model is derived from the Transbus Bus 2000 project that was ultimately dropped in the UK in favour of the Enviro 200. Bus 2000 was however developed for the American market, and has been on sale there since 2002. Consequently the mild steel and aluminium structure has been thoroughly tried and tested, although Plaxton is at pains to point out that the new model has undergone extensive development, and that for all intents and purposes Centro is really a totally new product.

The clean and stylish exterior styling has been developed with an eye to encourage people to reconsider their misconceptions about the quality of public transport. The interior will feature continuous lighting concealed in the roof and all the seats will be forward or side facing - Plaxton's research told them passengers do not like traveling backwards. Centro has been engineered from the outset to accept seats with belts. Extra wow factor will be generated by the LED tail, stop and indicator lights.

Speaking on the BBC's Working Lunch programme last week, chief executive Brian Davidson said Plaxton had the ambition to grow the firm to 500 employees in the next few years.



A novel design element in the Centro frame is the adjustable pick-up point for the central floor rails. This means the section can easily be adapted to suit different rear driveline modules or to suit specific floor layouts – gaining great flexibility and utilisation for minimum alteration.



Universities pitch for 2012

Operators encouraged to visit exhibition to see Olympic-class accommodation

The 2012 London Olympic Games could be the perfect platform for tour operators to book groups into college and university accommodation.

The 2006 Venuemasters Exhibition, at the Business Design Centre in May, has signed up one of the key organisers of the winning Olympic bid to explain how he selected to home the teams and organisers, and why. Charles Wijeratna joined the Olympic bid in 2003 with a background in valuing hotel and leisure companies for Dresdner Kleinworth Wasserstein.

A former Sky Sports producer, who went on to advise Granada Compass in the sale of the Forte hotel chains for £3.6bn, he was ideally placed to negotiate the massive accommodation requirement for the thousands of athletes, support staff and Olympic organisers. But there's still a massive audience of schools, athletics clubs and other visiting groups to cater for.

Venuemasters 2006 is targeted at international group organisers, but operators expecting to get inquiries from groups at the huge event can see what's on offer from educational accommodation from Venuemasters.

With many visitors - particularly from emerging nations - expected to want cost-based packages, the UK's universities may have a perfect compromise of cost and quality for many visitors.

As the Olympic venues are spread around the country, with separate locations for such sports as sailing, there could be opportunities for operators outside of London.

Venuemasters 2006 is staged May 9.

Entry is free, and more details can be found on the website *www.venuemasters.co.uk/exhibition*, or by calling 0114 249 3090, or emailing *info@venuemasters.co.uk*

A warm Welsh welcome in the Disney hillside

If this year's Tour de France is starting in London, then perhaps there is no reason why European entente should not be extended to Disneyland Resort Paris celebrating St David's Day with a Welsh festival.

Greatdays, the Cheshire based wholesaler, is organising packages to the first festival of its kind, which will be held at the French theme park on Friday and Saturday, March 3 and 4.

The musical extravaganza starts with up and coming Welsh pop artists and bands taking to the stage.

This event is hosted by the Pop Factory, who organised crooning legend Tom Jones's homecoming concert last May to celebrate the singer's 65th birthday.

Artists due to perform include Beth Williams and Francesca, finalists in the Wawffactor (the Welsh version of Pop Idol), The Poppies and Kid Carlo.

On the Saturday night a mass Welsh male voice choir will headline a night of Welsh music and the celebrations will continue over the weekend with traditional dancing and music from youth bands.

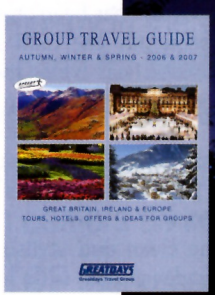
Greatdays is also hoping that several other new projects will strike the right note with operators.

First up is a 16-page brochure for the winter and spring of 2006/07.

Popular winter tours include Turkey & Tinsel packages throughout the UK with prices from £108 per person for four days' half-board accommodation in a three-star hotel in Torquay.

Other favourites such as Valentine weekends and Easter breaks are featured in prime locations such as Bath and Dublin.

The European selection includes two new tours - the Scandinavian markets in Oslo from £118 for a five-day tour and a river cruise in Belgium on the MS Diana.


GROUP TRAVEL GUIDE
AUTUMN, WINTER & SPRING - 2006 & 2007
GREAT BRITAIN, IRELAND & EUROPE
TOURS, HOTELS, OFFERS & IDEAS FOR GROUPS
GREATDAYS

Also on offer is a Best of London flyer that offers one-night breaks from £39 in a four-star hotel that includes a trip on the London Eye and a cruise on the Thames.

Theatre breaks are featured and Greatdays is offering a 2 for 1 deal that costs from £115 per person and comprises two nights' accommodation and two shows on consecutive evenings.

For details of the Welsh festival breaks, call 0161 928 4422 (fax 0161 928 5511) or email: *disney@greatdays.co.uk* For copies of the 2006/07 brochure and the London flyer, call 0161 928 9966 (fax 0161 928 13320 or email: *sales@greatdays.co.uk*

Pod cast: take a trip on the London Eye as part of a Greatdays' short break. Inset, Winter warmers: the Greatdays brochure

Time to explore West Dorset

Tourism officials in West Dorset are promoting the area to groups and schools through a new and updated Group Travel Guide. The publication features more than 40 attractions split into four sections – museums, leisure and outdoor activities, historical houses and gardens and arts and heritage. To support the guide and to help organisers to plan their visit, the district council also offers a group booking service with experienced Blue Badge Guides. Blue Badge-led trips include a Thomas Hardy walking tour of Dorchester and visit to the Old Crown Court and cells, where groups can experience the chilling remainder of 200 years of crime and punishment. Copies of the guide are available on 01305 252241 and more information about the area may be found on West Dorset District Council's tourism website at *www.westdorset.com*

Norman conquest comes to an end for Rodgers' company

A change of policy in the way Normandy is marketed has meant that the 12-year relationship between European Marketing Service, the Bristol-based tourism marketing firm, and the Normandy Regional Tourist Board has come to an end.

Stephen Rodgers, who runs European Marketing Service, said the move was due mainly to a redefinition of roles between the regional and county tourist authorities in France. In future, the regional tourist board will concentrate on promoting Normandy's image while the five separate county tourist boards will handle relations with the travel trade. European Marketing Service is still being retained by the Normandy Tourist Board to work on individual promotional and advertising campaigns.

Rodgers maintains the changes were mutually agreeable and reflect shifts in market trends. "We were appointed in 1993 after a strategic review recommended that Normandy should have somebody on the ground in its major foreign market place," he explained.

"A lot has happened in 12 years, with new and emerging markets as well as a significant shift in consumer booking patterns. It makes sense that plans should change when looking at the next five to ten year marketing strategy. Normandy has no doubt been one of my biggest and most enjoyable clients but we all need to move on. Whilst we will still work for the tourist board as required, the ending of our contract also removes some restrictions on our own business development"

French leave: Stephen Rodgers

European Marketing Service is no longer prevented from dealing with other French authorities and the first new area to be signed up is the Meuse in eastern France. Located between Champagne and Alsace, the area commemorates the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Verdun this year and Rodgers sees this as an opportunity to focus attention on its many other more marketable attractions.

Opening doors for disability

Many operators are all to aware of their legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, so they will be pleased to learn of a new move that might help them choose suitable venues, restaurants and pubs.

A free access assessment scheme has been set up by directenquiries.com, the Nationwide Access Register, in partnership with RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation). Since October 2004, venues, restaurants and pubs have had to consider making adjustments to their premises to overcome physical barriers to access and services. At the very least they should be aware of what facilities they can/cannot offer and have planned improvements with budgets and a timeline.

The assessment helps venues, restaurants and pubs provide better facilities for disabled people by allowing them to review their own access and facilities. It also removes the fear and uncertainty they may have been facing over potential costs. Venues, restaurants and pubs who go on to register with *directenquiries.com* can use the results of their access assessment, with the directenquiries.com action plan to identify areas where access needs improvement along with the possible costs and timescales.

The plan also includes advice on simple changes that can be made to improve access to goods and services at no cost. Grant Kennedy, the chief executive of *directenquiries.com*, said: "Venues, restaurants and pubs regularly offer good service to disabled people or parents seeking pushchair access. Unfortunately, most struggle in providing better physical access or communicating what access they have, usually due to the belief that it is too costly to make changes, or too expensive to audit. A lack of understanding has driven many to simply ignore the whole issue, unaware that not everything involves cost.

" Our free access assessment offers a way out of this difficult situation and details a cost effective way to move forward. Providing better access to premises and communicating with disabled people is not only a legal obligation but makes good business sense."

Bert Massie, the chairman of the Disability Rights Commission, has backed the scheme and underlined the commercial value of the scheme insofar as it would service providers to attract more business from the 10 million disabled adults who spend millions of pounds a year in the UK.

COACH TOURISM

John Johnson
Johnsons Coach Travel, Henley-in-Arden

Richard Bantock
Moat House Hotels

Steve Whiteway
Epsom Coaches

Sean Taggart
Albatross Travel Group

Jon Hartley
Intercontinental Hotel Group

Talking about the future: BAWTA tackles tourism

Gloves off for growth

A tour operators' 'think tank' met for the first time last week to talk about growing the market. Mark Williams was there to hear the verbal sparring

By Mark Williams

The first-ever discussion group to ask operators what they want from their wholesaler was staged last week.

The British Association of Wholesale Tour Agents (BAWTA) set up the lunchtime think tank to take a look at what's happening in the group tourism market now, and what can be done to improve business.

"We should be looking at how we promote groups business to hotels, not just taking the easy money," said BAWTA chairman Sean Taggart. "We face challenges from all directions - the cost of legislation, the independent traveller, low-cost flights and other challenges.

"BAWTA should and does take the coach market very seriously. It is very keen to promote best practise in wholesaling so it is an effective distribution channel, and an outsource for ideas for coach operators."

Is the market literally dying off?

John Johnson, Johnsons Coach Travel, Henley-in-Arden: "You might say we're in a period of consolidation at the moment," he said. "We are not seeing any growth."

Richard Bantock, Moat House Hotels: "Is your market literally dying off?"

John Johnson: "Yes, the modern retiree is a different person from the market we traditionally serve. And for these people, the car is king."

Steve Whiteway, Epsom Coaches: "I went to talk to a Rotary Club about our products, and they were asking if I'd driven my own coach there - that's where they see this industry, as if we're still running charabancs.

"They were really taken aback when I told them we run £230,000 vehicles in a firm with £12 million turnover. We're still seen as a bit 'bucket and spade.'"

Sean Taggart, Albatross Travel Group: "I think the coach industry does still have an image problem. We're

under pressure to innovate. Coach tour operations are the only PSV market segment that has not really consolidated."

Steve Whiteway: "Sean's right. WA-Shearings is seen as the biggest but it only has 14% of the coach tour market."

Richard Bantock: "The industry has really got to get a new audience aboard a new coach - a coach isn't what they think a coach is like."

Jon Hartley, Intercontinental Hotel Group: "Coaches are far better than people think they are. The people we would like to travel are looking for better quality, but they don't want to be treated as a group."

Steve Moore, Independent Coach Travel: "They want to be treated as individuals, not as a member of 'the coach group' when they have dinner at hotels."

Steve Whiteway: "There's still an awful stigma attached to travelling by coach."

John Johnson: "When people tell their friends they went on a coach holiday, they naturally assume you can't afford much better."

How does the industry raise its profile?

John Johnson: "There are fundamental limitations; coaches can't be more comfortable and they can't be faster. But speed isn't everything. The cruise market is up by 40% - the same growth as air travel."

Steve Moore: "If people want air travel, don't you have to get in bed with the enemy?"

John Johnson: "Probably. But no coach operator has done well with long-haul flights other than selling the occasional half-dozen seats."

Sean Taggart: "Saga has been very good at turning its retired customers for one product into a customer for another product. What else might your customers buy from you? Maybe anything... fly-coach holidays and lots of other products."

Steve Whiteway: "We've tried selling other insurances such as household. Saga may have has success with it, but we didn't start off with their database. It's difficult because you can't get in at the right end of price."

Steve Moore: "But do coach operators really know what their customers want? Why are Page & Moy successful, and why are Travelsphere expanding? Is it just price?"

Sean Taggart: "Maybe, but I believe coach operators are better served trying to make a good argument why their holidays are £300 or £400 instead of attacking the price."

Is coach touring just one market?

John Johnson: "Recently we've noticed that we can't get the younger older people who travel with us - I mean those under 75 and relatively fit - to travel with the older customers. They are not keen to wait around for the really elderly.

"And that semi-ambulant elderly market may be bigger than we think. If you look at the statistics for the disabled, the elderly and for obesity you do wonder if it's a bigger market."

> The people we would like to travel are looking for better quality, but they don't want to be treated as a group.
>
> Jon Hartley

Steve Moore ICT

> There's still an awful stigma attached to travelling by coach.
>
> Steve Whiteway

Read the full report in this month's Out&About – FREE with CBW on February 23

Mark Wood MD, Woods Tours, Leicester

Steve Moore: "How are you telling the people who have travelled with you that you are a holiday company, not just a coach holiday company?"

John Johnson: "We issue questionnaires to our existing customers which explain a lot of what we do."

Steve Moore: "I am concerned that coach operators don't expand their catchment areas. I talk to coach operators who say they are growing their programme, but when they are fishing in the same pond as before, this just leads to more cancellations."

Steve Whiteway: "We did try to expand into other areas but we found we alienate our public if they have too many feeders. You hear stories about WA-Shearings holidays going past their customers' front door four hours after they've set off. But it can work. Crusader of Clacton is doing some huge feeder runs and making it work. There's no doubt home pick-up are the thing."

John Johnson: "Getting back to the age thing, we are still dealing with the elderly primarily. On our Sidmouth tours the average age is 80."

Sean Taggart: "How many 55-year-olds do you carry?"

Steve Whiteway: "A very small percentage around Epsom. But every area is different."

"Sean Taggart: "OK, so we've established that expanding your catchment area is costly and has drawbacks with customer service. But I'm not sure how deeply coach operators are looking at their potential market."

Caption

Family firm's future hangs in the balance

Long-established company awaiting decision of traffic commissioner

THE FUTURE of long-established County Durham-based family firm Martindale's Taxis and Minicoaches remains in doubt after a public inquiry was adjourned last week.

Owner Margaret Martindale and son Mark, who now runs the business founded by his father 32 years ago, were not able to produce company records at the Leeds hearing on Wednesday, January 25.

The documentary evidence had to be shown at the North Eastern area public inquiry to demonstrate serious system failures highlighted during VOSA inspections had been rectified.

Failure to prove that any measures had been taken could have resulted in regulatory action being taken against them under section 16, 17 and Schedule 3 of the 1981 Public Passenger Vehicles Act and section 28 of the 1985 Transport Act.

The charges related to an unsatisfactory maintenance investigation, prohibition notices sustained, failure to comply with undertakings and statements of expectation given plus repute, financial standing and professional competence.

But presiding deputy traffic commissioner Elizabeth Perrett gave the pair an opportunity to produce the necessary evidence by adjourning the hearing until next week.

It may prove to be a brief resumption that deals solely with whether the paperwork shows sufficient improvements have been made to the company's systems as most of the evidence was detailed during last week's lengthy hearing.

Martindales of County Durham was given a rough ride by deputy traffic commissioner Elizabeth Perrett

What the vehicle examiner said:

VOSA vehicle examiner Gordon Whittaker said he conducted a maintenance investigation on July 11 last year after finding a seatbelt buckle cover missing on a coach during an unannounced site visit five days earlier which exposed sharp edges likely to cause injury.

One vehicle was inspected during the later visit to the firm's premises in George Street, Shildon, County Durham, and the following defects were found: near side front tyre worn below the legal limit; entrance door defective and likely to cause injury; steering relay arm pivot excessively worn; power steering ram joint mechanism excessively worn; and air leaking from the handbrake valve.

Mr Whittaker added maintenance records showed vehicles consistently missed their stated four-weekly safety inspection cycle by at least a week and one vehicle had gone 14 weeks without being looked at.

He noted the inspections conducted on the vehicle he examined on July 11 were erratic - December 21 2004, January 19 2005, April 1 2005 and May 17 2005 - and there was little evidence to prove any defects found during these checks had been repaired.

"Inspections and rectification work over the last two years have not been carried out by the named company on the licence," Mr Whittaker said. "A former fitter at the company and then a number of different people carried out the work.

"Mr (Mark) Martindale said he had been assured the fitter or the contractor had rectified the defects. But the paperwork showed little evidence of any defects being repaired and only showed that an inspection had been carried out."

VOSA traffic examiner Ray Jones gave evidence next and told the hearing the vehicle with the seatbelt buckle problem, a 32-seater Mercedes, had been driven 2,013km between July 6 and July 22 while a prohibition notice was in force on it.

The coach was driven a further 59km before theprohibition notice was finally removed on July 25 when the seatbelt was finally repaired.

"The vehicle concerned was driven to and from Newcastle a number of times by a man known only as 'Doug' who seems to have done this as a favour to Mr Martindale," Mr Jones said.

"It is not even clear whether he had an appropriate licence to drive a vehicle of that nature."

What the operator said:

Solicitor Roger Hird, acting for the company, called CPC holder Margaret Martindale to give evidence first and she detailed the company's background.

She explained Martindale's Taxis and Minicoaches has a standard international licence with authorisation to run up to four vehicles and she had taken over the business when her husband died in 1978.

But health problems over the last 12 years, including a heart attack and two strokes, meant she had handed the responsibility for running the business to her son - who is not a qualified CPC licence holder.

"I sometimes put in 20 hour days before my health worsened," Mrs Martindale said. "I am not happy with the amount of supervision I can provide at the moment as I am only able to do two to three days a week.

"My intention has been to keep the business going so that my son can take over fully once he has got his CPC licence. But I have noticed things are not right in the way they are being run and I fear for the future."

Mark Martindale was the final person called to give evidence and explained the vehicle that had gone 14 weeks without being inspected was off the road at the time but not marked as such on the relevant paperwork.

He added the mileage done in the vehicle with the seatbelt fault was because various contractors could not fit it in to be repaired and there was nowhere in Newcastle to store the coach overnight, thus explaining the repeated trips.

"These mistakes occurred after a key worker left us in 2004," Mr Martindale said. "I did not realise the seriousness of keeping to the four-weekly inspection cycle and I have no excuse for that.

"The seatbelt was broken off by children, or whatever, and we had difficulty booking it in for repair. I knew a couple of fitters in Newcastle who agreed to take the work on but there was no place to store it overnight.

"We were under a lot of pressure at the time and I did not realise that taking it up there would have required an exemption from VOSA."

Mr Martindale added he had obtained a home study pack to allow him to prepare for the CPC exams and had tried to recruit another CPC licence holder to take over from his mother in the interim but failed to find a suitable candidate in the local area.

> **It is not even clear whether he had an appropriate licence to drive a vehicle of that nature**

While he admitted not seeking advice from a transport consultant, he had implemented all the recommendations made to him by Mr Whittaker and Mr Jones - but could not prove it as there was no paperwork available.

What the traffic commissioner said:

Miss Perrett was critical of this and said: "I would have expected that somebody in your profession would have come to realise that you needed help and got a consultant in who could give your systems a root and branch overhaul.

"But months down the line from Mr Whittaker's report it still seems you are dependent on other people and there are no records to show your systems are improving.

"I have to be sure that your customers and other road users are not at risk. At the moment I cannot be certain that this is a safe and well-run business and I am not happy to let your licence go on until I am certain everything is in order."

Miss Perrett added she was minded to either revoke the licence or least suspend it until Mr Martindale had passed the CPC exams.

But she was persuaded by Mr Hird to defer a final decision until Mr Whittaker had been able to assess the procedures put in place over the months since his report was compiled.

Mr Hird said: "It does seem to me to be a little draconian to suspend the fleet or revoke the licence when the system as it was was ok to be allowed to continue running all these months.

"I hope you will defer your decision until Mr Whittaker has been able to make a return visit to check that the new procedures are working effectively.

"I would not pretend that the business is in a strong position. It is vulnerable and Mrs Martindale would be left in some hardship through the loss of income from the business."

Miss Perrett agreed to give the operator a chance to produce the relevant paperwork and said: "I suppose it would be unfair to suspend or revoke the licence if you are running a perfect system. Scoop up all the records you have and let Mr Whittaker have a good look at it.

"And between now and when we come back you should also get some professional advice from a consultant to get you on the straight and narrow."

The hearing was due to resume as CBW went to press. Full report in next week's issue.

Salient points

- **The following problems were reported on just one vehicle: Near side front tyre worn below legal limit; entrance door defective and likely to cause injury; steering relay arm pivot excessively worn; power steering ram joint mechanism excessively worn; and air leaking from handbrake valve**
- **Mark Martindale, who runs the business, is not CPC qualified**
- **Deputy traffic commissioner considering revoking licence**

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Burton Albion: 'the real story'

On Wednesday, January 18, a great event took place in Burton upon Trent. Our local team, Burton Albion, won the right to play the great Manchester United at Old Trafford in the FA Cup.

On that day 10,500 people, one sixth of the population of the town, travelled from Burton to Manchester for the game. The travelling support was the largest to visit Old Trafford in modern times - an amazing achievement for a small Nationwide League football club!

More than half of these visiting supporters travelled by coach - over 100 vehicles - and all booked and arranged by local coach operators in just ten days.

As the operator who normally provides coaches for away travel for the club, we were asked to source 40 coaches. Many operators rang me to offer their services - not many of us are overworked on a Wednesday in January! Like Swiftsure Travel, most of these businesses are private hire and touring companies whose operations are not tied to school contracts and for whom driving hours was never an issue.

Your anonymous writer (Inbox, CBW January 26) has clearly overdosed on sour grapes. I understand that it must be frustrating for those who are committed to contracts when an opportunity like this comes along, and the writer is right to put his contractual commitments first. But he/she should not slander those of us who are in a position to grasp the opportunity.

Richard Hackett
Managing director, Swiftsure Travel

Cross-Channel caution

I was interested to read your article in CBW, December 22, about bus operators being warned of cross-Channel stowaways.

This firm has represented hundreds of HGV operators and their drivers over the past few years in respect of the carrier's liability provisions of the same piece of legislation, which has been applied to HGV operators since April 2000.

Although the problem is not now as bad as it was a few years ago, a considerable number of Penalty Notices are still being imposed on operators and drivers and Civil Penalties are being levied of up to £2,000 per "clandestine" brought into the UK.

I note that it is now proposed to implement the provisions in relation to passenger transport vehicles. Coach operators should take great care to follow the Code of Practice. It will be a defence to the penalty if the operator can show that he did not know the "clandestines" were on board and that he had a proper and effective system in place to try and prevent their carriage and that the system was being properly operated on the journey in question.

The Immigration Officers put much store on the checklist that the Home Office recommends is carried by the driver on which he can record the checks that he makes during his journey. Operators will therefore find it helpful to introduce a checklist, provide their drivers with appropriate training and monitor their drivers' use of the checklists over a period of time.

If an operator is unfortunate enough to find himself the subject of such penalties it is definitely worth writing and objecting to the penalty and asking for a review of the case. In my experience, this is almost invariably successful in reducing, or avoiding altogether, the penalty that is initially imposed by the Immigration Officer

Jane George,
Rothera Dowson

BAWTA group 'helpful'

The British Association of Wholesale Tour Agents' discussion group (see pages 18-19) was one of the most interesting meets I have had for a long time. It will be interesting to see where the continued series of such discussions leads, as so many opinions were expressed covering the future of coach operations in general. From a hotelier's point of view, John Johnson's comment that his tours manager hadn't time to plan all-new tours, and that he relied on wholesalers was interesting.

The group market is highly valued by the InterContinental Hotels group I represent, and we are finding many groups are now willing to pay a couple of pounds more for a better product.

I notice that the market changes appear to be levelling out after some years of decline, and shorter weekend or midweek breaks are taking the place of the traditional resort-based long-stay holidays. Even then, many look for an added incentive to travel. Special interest and themed holidays are clearly winners, but some innovative thoughts are needed here to expand these to attract new clients.

Do coach operators see themselves as coach holiday operators, or holiday operators who sell coach holidays? The latter can expand into rail, air, cruise, self drive, whatever! The former is dealing with a loyal but diminishing market and perhaps needs to re-evaluate their market.

Jon Hartley,
Otley, West Yorkshire

LETTER OF THE WEEK

I understand what the big operators are saying about Quality Bus Contracts but I don't think it matters much to smaller operators like me.

Getting into the bus market commercially is a no-no because the moment I start to compete I believe will have the Big Boys on my tail, and all my investment will go up the exhaust pipe. That's why I prefer to bid for supported services where I'm unlikely to get competition. So, Quality Contracts would just be more of the same for me; either I get the contract and invest in vehicles and staff, or I don't and I keep my money.

Quality Partnership will never work for me because the councils just aren't interested in talking to the little man, and even if I made the first approach, I know I'd get ignored or kept waiting months and years for a decision.

Though there are a lot of occasions when I couldn't beat the big boys with Quality Contracts, there are others when I reckon I could give them a run for their money. I just hope the councils have got the money to spend in the first place, not just on contracts but on the roads so we aren't up against traffic all the time.

Name and address supplied

Hot topics

- **Is the coach tour market dying - literally - and where do we get our new customers?**
- **What's on Alistair Darling's mind; a return to regulation or bringing the local authorities to heel?**

CBW
Minibus
NEW
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February 2006

THIS MONTH

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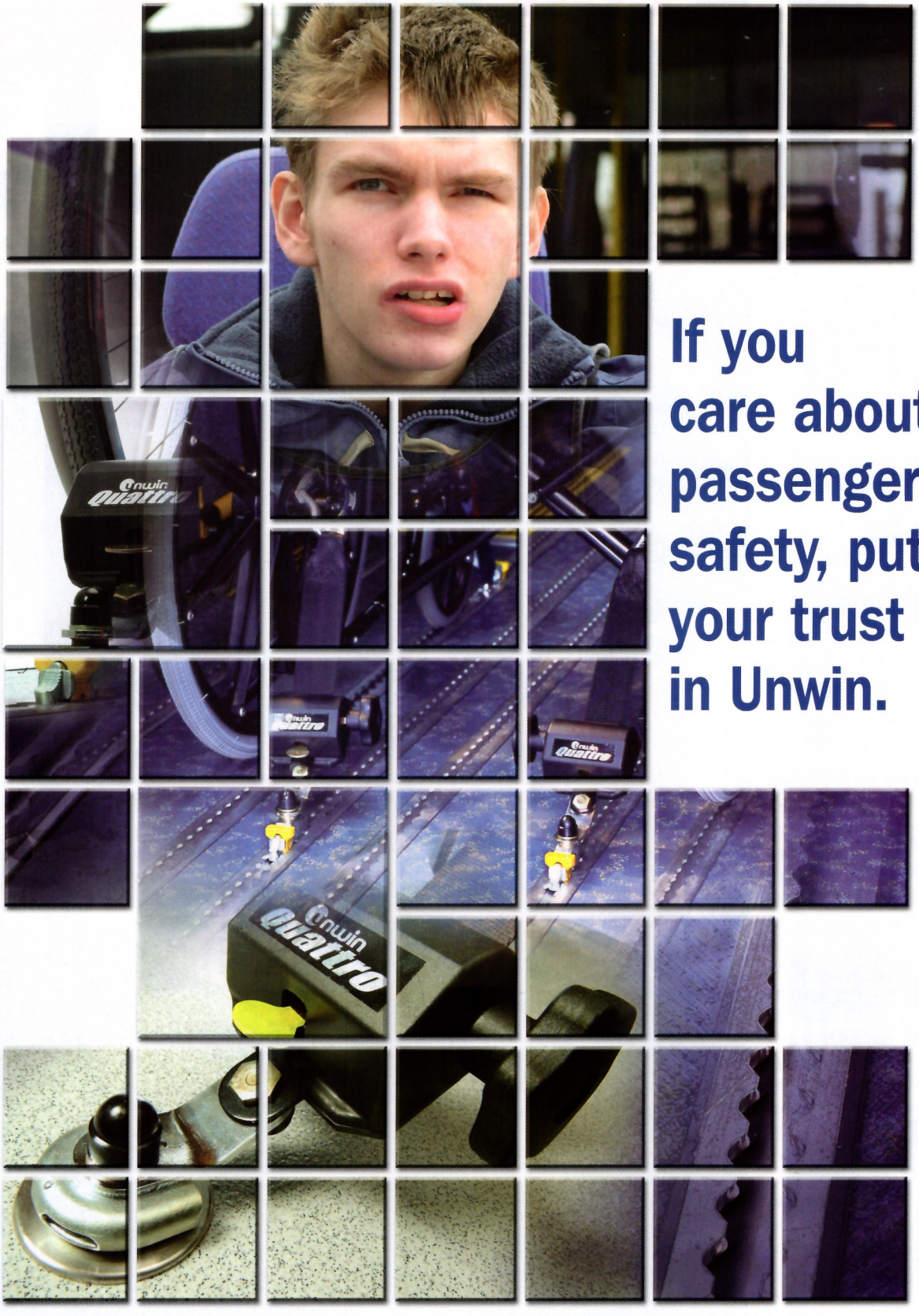
Mercedes banking on successful investment page 4

Opera star
Abacus launches new coach-style seating range page 6

Transit reborn
Ford favourite given 'car-like' feel in first redesign in six years
page 7

Mellor vision

Mellor Coachcraft builds on success in minibus market – is the Lancashire firm set to dominate? page 8



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The key to success

Welcome to the first edition of our relaunched Minibus magazine.

The supplement will appear in the first week of every month and we hope to keep it full of topical news and information about what is happening across a diverse and very busy sector of the transport industry.

There is a lot scheduled to happen this year with more new vehicles coming from the major manufacturers and a number of new body options on existing platforms - so we have a pretty full programme ahead to keep you updated with all the latest developments.

One of the country's leading vehicle builders, Mellor Coachcraft, is predicting major changes to come within the minibus market and is already seeing signs that things are on the change. Minibus went to Westhoughton recently to talk with directors Neil Crowther and Geoff Hudson about how they are being affected.

Ford's launch of a completely new Transit for 2006 comes at a time, notably just ahead, of when its competitors are also releasing new ranges into what is becoming a revitalised marketplace.

The timing of these launches coincide can be strongly allied to the onset of Euro 4 emissions legislation which comes into operation on 1 August. When the new Mercedes Sprinter and Volkswagen Crafter are also brought to the market there will be a plethora of operationally attractive hardware to choose from. It is a fair assumption prices will rise to cater for the advanced technology introduced alongside Euro 4 but what operators will need to do is weigh up which ones are offering the lowest overall cost of ownership combined with the efficiencies they will all claim gives them a competitive advantage.

Under new ownership, LDV has been refinanced sufficiently to plough on with development work and ensure the factory-built Maxus minibus and Maxus chassis cowls for coachbuilt applications are ready for launch at the CV Show on 25-27 April at the NEC. Sadly, Allan Amey, chief executive of LDV and the man who led the buyout team, is to step down.

Efficient operation - saving fuel and cutting emissions are highly desirable traits and Mercedes-Benz is showing how, for a modest investment, operators in urban driving situations can save serious money on their fuel bills. Look out for a report on this in next month's issue

Martin Cole
Editor

Sprinter reborn

Mercedes hopes investment pays off

By Martin Cole

Costing an impressive 1.8 million euros to develop, the new Mercedes-Benz Sprinter will hit the road at the end of March.

The new Sprinters are built at the two German factories in Dusseldorf and Ludwigsfelde (Brandenburg). DaimlerChrysler invested £550 million in expanding the paint and body shop in Dusseldorf, where panel vans and crewbuses are produced. The company also invested £300 million in new paint and body shops for the Ludwigsfelde plant, where pickups and chassis versions are built.

Many frame and body parts are laser-welded, laser-brazed or bonded. A considerably greater proportion of sheet metal components is galvanised than on the previous model. Meticulous seam seals, application of stone chip primer in vulnerable areas and undersealing is designed to ensure long life and value retention. The structure also undergoes a new rotation dipping process at Ludwigsfelde. In each pre-treatment bath, the bodies are rotated a full 360° about their transverse axis to ensure a uniform allover coating of all sheet metal parts and all cavities.

New sprinter models offer around 1,000 different variations

Larger range

Extended range options mean there will be something like a thousand different versions of the new Sprinter through a combination of different wheelbases, lengths, heights, weight ratings, body types, engines and transmissions. Three wheelbases of 3250, 3665 or 4325 mm are available with four body lengths, and with a choice of standard roof, high roof or new super-high roof. GVW ratings range from 3.0 to 5.0 tonnes.

Specification

Standard specification includes electrically operated windows, radio, remote control central locking, driver's airbag, six-speed transmission, wide-angle mirrors and ADAPTIVE ESP. New seats are anatomically contoured for better support, the driver's seat has infinitely variable height adjustment. Halogen H7 headlamps offer enhanced performance and have integrated sidelights. Optional bi-xenon

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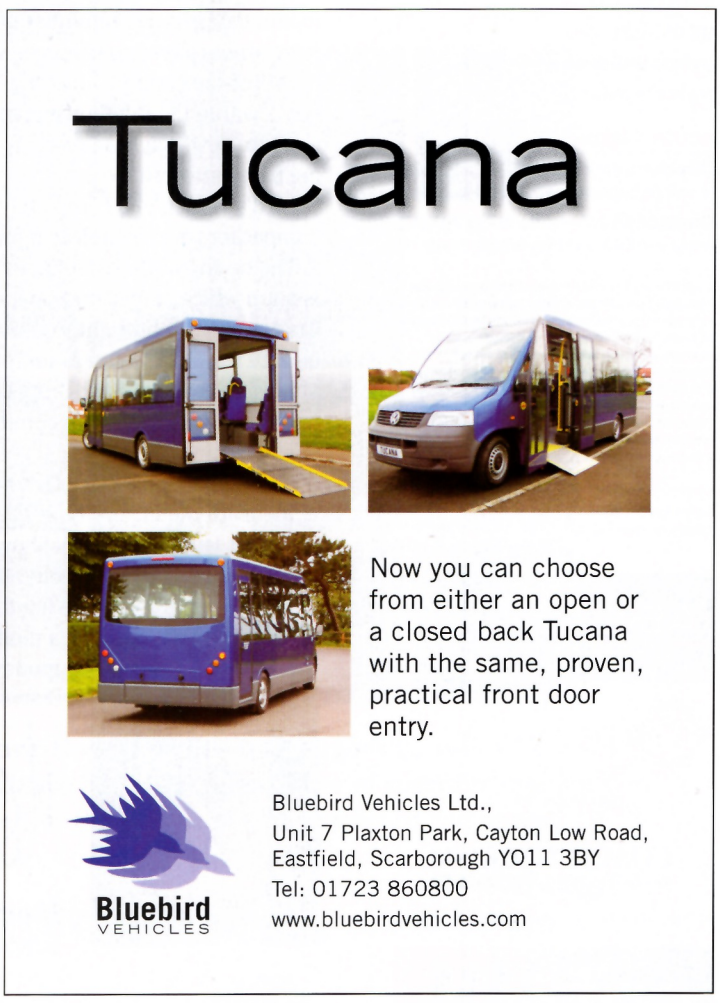
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headlamps can be specified and these incorporate an Add-Light system with cornering light function - both new features to the van market.

Engines

Available power units include a four-cylinder 2148 cc OM 646 CDI turbodiesel offering four output ratings, ranging from 65 kW (88 hp) to 110 kW (150 hp). All are claimed to deliver powerful low-end torque and excellent fuel economy. The new OM 642 option is a 3.0-litre V6 unit developing a maximum output of 135 kW (184 hp) and a maximum torque of 400 Nm. It features an aluminium crankcase, a balancer shaft and two overhead camshafts per cylinder bank. All units meet Euro 4 or EU 4/III low emissions rating and are equipped as standard with a particulate filter.

There is also a petrol option - a 3.5 litre V6 unit, delivering 258 hp via a five-speed automatic gearbox.

Allan Amey retiring from LDV Group

LDV chief executive Allan Amey has announced his retirement and will step down in May as he reaches his 60th birthday.

Amey's replacement is an interim CEO, Charles P Megan, currently an operating executive with an affiliate of Sun Capital Partners - LDV's new owners.

Mr Amey relinquishes the post immediately but will continue to serve LDV in a transitional consulting role until his retirement.

Megan said: "I would like to recognise Allan Amey's many contributions to LDV and wish him well in his retirement. We intend to build upon the foundation that Allan has laid."

Amey said, "I have had the privilege to lead LDV for the past 12 years. In the last year, we have achieved two major objectives: the launch of the MAXUS product range, which will see the business through the next decade, and the completion of a new financial sponsorship that has the capability to support the next phase of LDV's growth."

Briefly

ROELANT de Waard is the new chairman and managing director, Ford of Britain. He replaces Paul Thomas who becomes vice-president marketing for Ford of Europe. Born in the Netherlands, de Waard, 43, previously headed Ford of Europe's customer service division.

COACHBUILDER and converter Frank Guy Ltd has moved from its Clay Cross premises to a new site in nearby Holmewood. The new facility is easier to access from the M1.

The new improved
SPRINTER ACCESSIBLE
Britain's most accessible bus?

The Sprinter Accessible is now even more accessible thanks to several improvements introduced by Mellor Coachcraft, working closely with Mercedes Benz Minibus, Germany.

The Sprinter Accessible already offers unparalleled seating and wheelchair flexibility, roll-on access, outstanding carrying capacity and full after sales support from Evobus Service Centres.

The new model also offers the ability to raise & lower the rear suspension to cope with speed humps etc, increased lower floor & upper deck areas & improved interior lining panels.

Northern Area Sales
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Left, Opera's seat frame is designed for left or right-hand interchange and it moves sideways to give passengers more room. The seatbelt retractor can swap sides and is located to be completely unobtrusive yet provide unimpeded belt flow. Right, moulded seat squab snaps into place and is lightweight but very comfortable. Alternative sizes will be available

Above, robust and stylish folding armrests can carry a wood-effect finish or be embossed with company logos for a personal or corporate touch. Their slim profile prevents fouling against the seat squab and helps reduce the overall width of each seat installation

A night at the Opera

Abacus launches coach-style seating range

The latest product to join the Abacus Tubular Products seating range is the Opera – a coach-style, high-backed unit which is comfortable, lightweight and durable.

Tested to meet M2 requirements the Opera is available in widths of 400mm, 425mm or 450mm and offers an exceptionally good seat pitch combined with low weight to maximise seating capacity or increase the useful payload. Maximum leg length is 330mm.

The seat is the result of a collaboration between Abacus and Italian manufacturer Gibicar – taking a lot of innovative ideas, design and construction techniques from Abacus and developing a comprehensive and attractive package which can benefit from large-scale production methods and specialist tooling for plastic mouldings and seat foams, to which the Italian company has instant access.

Fixed or reclining seats are available with three-point lap and diagonal seatbelts and the modular design means they can easily be reconfigured for left or right-hand installation.

Seat squabs can be removed very quickly but fit firmly and will not move when in use. Folding arm-rests and reclining unit adjusters are elegant, slim and fold away neatly when not required. The armrest can be supplied with personalised company logos embossed on the surface. Alternatively seat numbers could be included or the customer could specify a wood-effect moulding.

A nice feature of the Opera is its ability to move sideways a few inches into the aisle to create more room for passengers once seated. The sliding mechanism runs in PTFE bearings and will last the lifetime of the vehicle without wearing and developing annoying rattles.

Weights depend on the final build specification but a typical single recliner tips the scales at 19.5kg and a double recliner without the sideways sliding option weighs 29kg. Prices start at approximately £130 per seat place.

■ Contact Abacus on 01487 710700.

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VEHICLE

Transit revamp

Van range to be followed by minibuses

By Martin Cole, Minibus editor

FORD's Transit is being relaunched on a new platform - its first major revision for six years.

The new model is being introduced ahead of the latest developments from Mercedes-Benz and Volkswagen - who are revising the Sprinter and new Sprinter-based VW Crafter, throwing down the gauntlet and setting new standards for the competition to aim for.

Ford says the whole product, from front to back, has changed and it will come with new engines to meet the Euro 4 emissions regulations due to be implemented in August 2006. Engines will be built at Dagenham and are developed from Ford's joint technology agreement with PSA Peugeot Citroen. Bodies will continue to be built at the Southampton facility and transmissions will come from the Merseyside factory.

Much of the development of the new vehicle has centred on creating a platform that is very 'car-like' to drive with similar levels of driver comfort, nimble handling and the advanced safety features now commonplace in modern saloon cars.

The new front profile is characterised by a striking three-bar grille, which emphasizes the more vertically inclined headlamps and is garnished with a nine inch Ford oval badge.

A completely new dashboard complete with instruments, switches and a new steering wheel aid the affinity with modern cars, yet the practicality aspect of plenty of storage space has been maintained. The dash now incorporates a joystick-style gearshift, clearing the floor area in the cab and creating more space and easier accessibility. Trim levels have been enhanced with upgraded specification cloth materials and the base vehicle range will include a number of new and distinctive colour options. New-style wheels add to the external appearance. Prices will be announced this summer when the vehicle is launched onto the market.

Engines

Six Euro IV TDCi common-rail diesel engines and one LPG-compatible petrol engine form the new power unit choice.

Diesel options include new 2.2-litre and 2.4-litre Duratorq TDCi units, matched with either five-speed or six-speed Durashift manual transmissions. Both are said to deliver increased performance and enhanced fuel economy. The engine layout has also been revised for easier maintenance.

Ford aim to make the new Transit more 'car-like' to drive

The new-look is the first major change for six years

Security and Safety

Vehicle security has been improved to achieve lower insurance ratings and reduce cost of ownership. Two levels of alarm are available: Thatcham Category 1; and Passive Anti-Theft System (PATS). Other deterrents include a hood lock, cable-free doors and the industry's first configurable unlocking security system.

Safety features include Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Electronic Brake Force Distribution (EBD), Brake Traction Control System (BTCS) and an Electronic Stability Programme (ESP).

A driver's airbag is standard while seat-mounted side, head and thorax airbags are available as options for the first time. The redesigned front structure features a modified crumple-zone and offers better low speed impact resistance.

Driver comfort

Transit's revised interior delivers a pleasant workspace environment with a number of new convenience features. There are three levels of heating and ventilation, four trim options - including leather, ten seating arrangement options, cruise control availability and a new instrument cluster. The ignition key is a self-charging item and waterproof - the first of this type fitted to light commercial.

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Mellor – Coachbuilt dominance?

Martin Cole meets the men behind Mellor Coachcraft as the Lancashire firm makes waves in the minibus world

Martin Cole, Minibus editor

Coachbuilt minibuses are being tipped as the dominant product for independent producers as Type Approval draws nearer.

Mellor Coachcraft, traditionally based in Miall Street, Rochdale, has seen an unprecedented growth in interest and orders for its products and has been forced to begin moving production to its newer Mellor Vancraft facility at Westhoughton. One line has already been dedicated to the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter Accessible – Mellor's lowfloor minibus based on the six-tonne Sprinter 616 chassis, other Sprinter derivatives and their Volkswagen LT counterparts – and they are being built alongside the Mellor Vancraft conversions and the specialist hearses and stretched limousines from associated company Coleman-Milne.

One of 36 Sprinter minibuses for a local authority contract

Geoff Hudson

Sales director Geoff Hudson said: "I think we are in for quite a ride this year. Production of coachbuilt minibuses has soared and the Rochdale plant is almost bursting at the seams. Orders increased by 25% and these were mainly from new conquests – not existing customers. We delivered 160 coachbuilt minibuses in 2004, 190 last year and we are looking at 200 for this year – representing about another 15% growth.

"We've moved our production engineer, Mick Barlow, over there to drive through what extra efficiencies he can, but the layout of the factory is not conducive to such a high level of throughput and there is nothing we can do about expanding because we are bounded by housing on one side and a railway on the other.

"Eventually we are going to have to seek new facilities in Rochdale to accommodate our growth. The workforce has expanded accordingly and we were very fortunate in being able to absorb some of the skilled coachbuilding staff who were casualties of the TransBus collapse and subsequent closure of the former Northern Counties business at Wigan. Some of the conversion staff at Vancraft have also been transferred and are developing new skills under Mellor Coachcraft. Additionally, we've invested in top-quality people at management level and this is already showing dividends.

"I think we will still maintain a strong presence in the conversion market because we have been investing in development alongside manufacturers. Ultimately, when European Type Approval begins to bite it will be increasingly difficult for smaller converters to carry on. I see more and more of the standard minibus products being produced entirely by the OE manufacturers and in order to comply with public liability requirements they will not permit their base vehicles to be converted by anyone who is not fully approved and certified. Converters will have to demonstrate they work to the same high standards as OE producers and they will only work with the businesses which have invested in the necessary training and skill levels and have the correct manufacturing and administrative procedures in place.

"I see more of a future for builders of bespoke products but that is not a market to enter into lightly. It's a world apart from conversion. Margins on conversions are shrinking all the time

Geoff Hudson, sales director

> I see more of a future for builders of bespoke products but that is not a market to enter into lightly

so there will only be a handful of businesses who survive. I think the days of the back-street minibus converter are coming to an end.

We are also becoming disenchanted with the conversion market because of inconsistent deliveries from manufacturers. It's all very well planning production schedules and ordering a steady supply of base vehicles, but in practice the delivery of base vehicles is too sporadic. Too often we have a yard full of stock vehicles so we can't move or we have people standing around idle because we are waiting for deliveries. Some are running months behind their promised delivery dates and there's nothing we can do to avoid such situations."

Neil Crowther

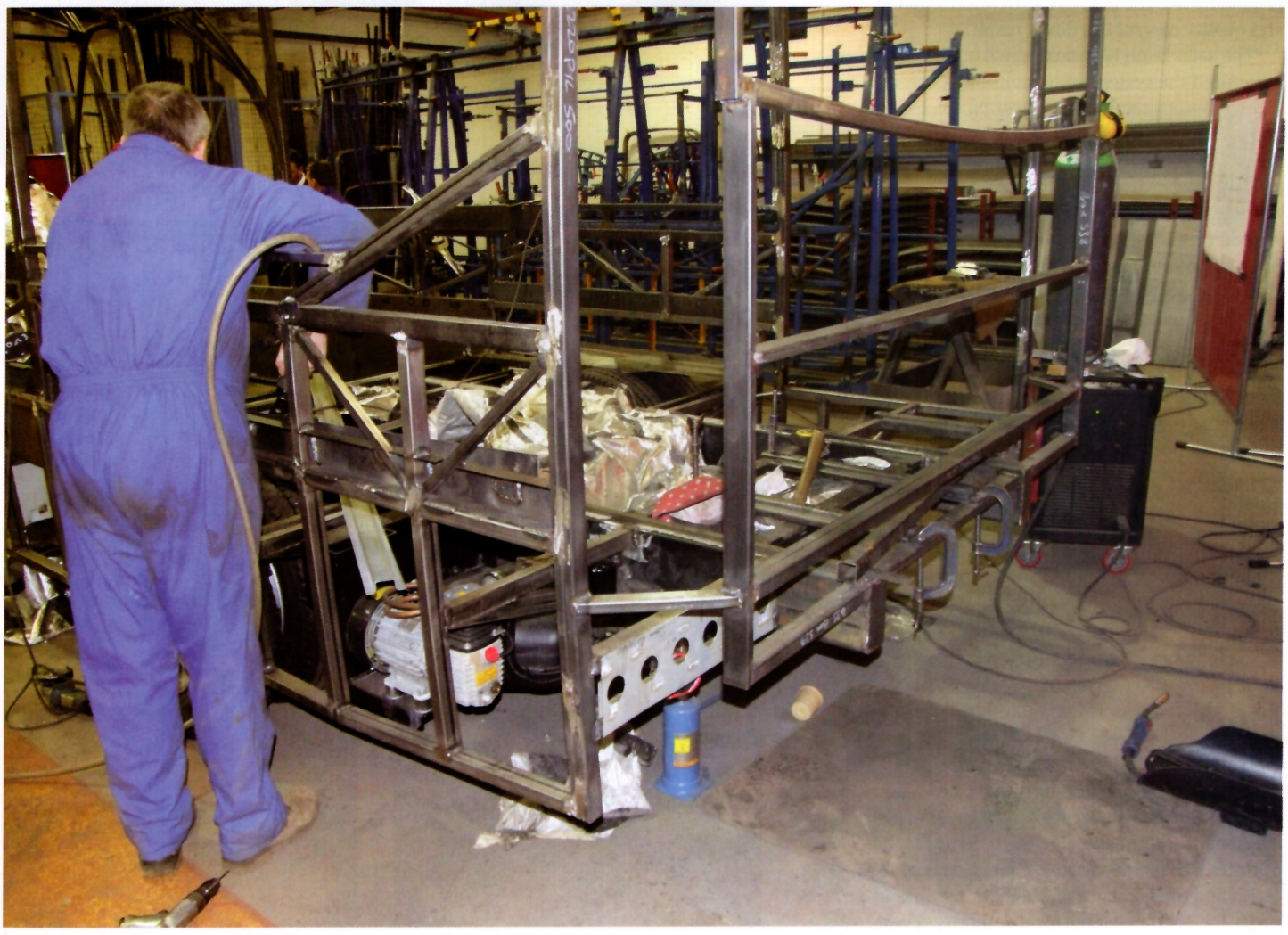
Managing director Neil Crowther added: "Mellor Coachcraft has, to some extent, become a victim of its own success. Since we developed and implemented new systems our warranty issues have all but been eliminated. We probably only get an average of two per month and most are very minor.

"We expect to move into full-swing at Westhoughton by March. If the volume of coachbuilt orders continues we will probably even add a separate line for the lowfloor vehicles. There's a lot to do this year in terms of development. There is a New Sprinter and VW LT 'Crafter' on the way. The Sprinter 616 is being replaced by a smaller 5.5 tonne chassis - so a number of things on Sprinter Accessible will have to change. The body may need to be narrower because the rear axle is not so wide, but we are hoping we don't have to make a completely new frame. Vario is also being upgraded and we are planning something special with that. We can't go any further with the design work until we see what changes Mercedes make to the frontal styling - but we aim to build something that will rival anything produced by either Plaxton or Optare.

"I'm really looking forward to when type approval comes in. We've invested heavily to take full advantage of it. It means we have to do a real finite element analysis of the product itself and the systems required before we even get to build it.

Neil Crowther, managing director

> I'm really looking forward to when type approval comes in. We've invested heavily to take full advantage of it



Skilled coachbuilding staff assemble jig-built framework with precision

"A lot of testing and proving is necessary and it's an expensive business. For example, when developing a body you have take into account the additional weight and its effect on the base product. A prime example in ensuring the braking system falls within requirements. Sprinter accessible is upgraded accordingly and we fit new rotors and different brake pads to accommodate the changes we've made.

"All this has to be fully approved by the OEM so testing has to be certified by a recognised agency. Pull tests have to be carried out on the floor and seating installation and we have to complete front and side impact tests."

Customer care

Part of Mellor's success, believes Geoff Hudson, is due to the development of a 'customer care mentality.' He said there was now a real 'buzz' about the place and lots of enthusiasm within the workforce.

He said: "There seems to be a great deal more job satisfaction out of starting from scratch and seeing a fully finished product as a result. They are rightly proud of the vehicles they are producing and the improved attention to detail and quality control is a direct result.

"The sales team is also on a real high. We restructured the system some time ago. Currently we only have Bob Jones covering the North and Alison Prince in the south. They are big areas and I suspect we will be adding another sales person soon to ease their burden.

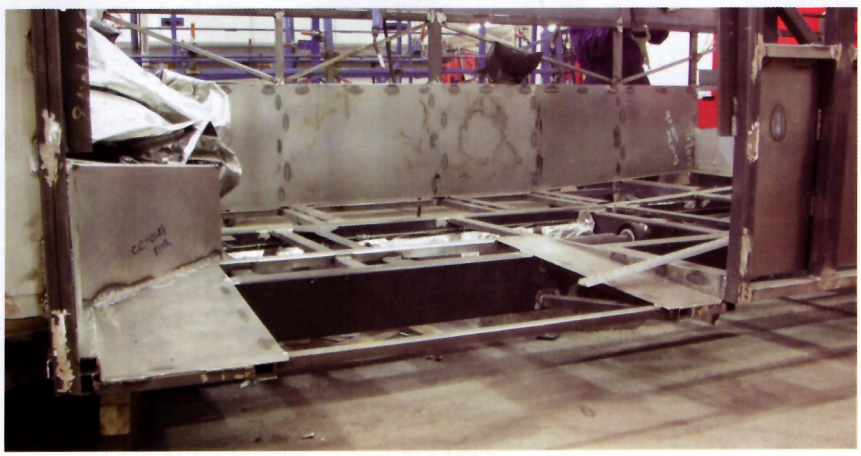
Their roles have changed substantially and we don't regard them as traditional representatives any more. They are part of the customer care ethic and they spend as much time looking after clients, perhaps more, than they do selling.

"We did away with commission and pay a fixed salary. That way there is less incentive to make a sale and just move to the next deal as quickly as possible in order to achieve higher rates. They are now calling in regularly on clients to make sure the vehicles are performing as they should and ironing out any problems customers may have."

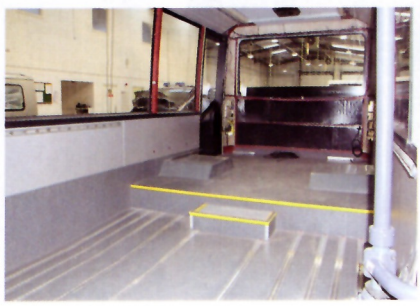
Mellor Coachcraft certainly has laid down strong foundations which will safeguard its future as a prominent manufacturer.

Since taking on the production of the low-floor Sprinter Accessible it has demonstrated the ability to produce components that carry official Mercedes-Benz part numbers and has worked closely with the OEM to implement design changes and modifications necessary to bring the vehicle to its current stage of development. Although sales started slowly the Sprinter Accessible created a great deal of interest and the highlight of 2005 was landing an order for 36 from a large local authority. These are in-build now.

Sprinter accessible production line moved into the Westhoughton Vancraft factory



Wide, single step entrance takes a folding ramp



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The conference will also provide an opportunity to share best practice and develop new strategies to develop a safer transport network.

Speakers include:

Roger Fisher, Head of the Fear of Crime Team, Home Office

Jeroen Weimar, Director of Transport Policing and Enforcement, Transport for London

Sergeant Phil Bennett, Principal Architectural Liaison Officer, British Transport Police

Councillor Tony Page, Transport Spokesman, Environment Board, Local Government Association (LGA), Cabinet Member (responsible for Community Action), Reading Council, Chair of Reading Buses and Member, Thames Valley Police Authority

Sue Nelson, Head of Community Safety, Rail Industry Community Safety Support Unit

Leo Markham, Officer for Wales, Bus Users UK

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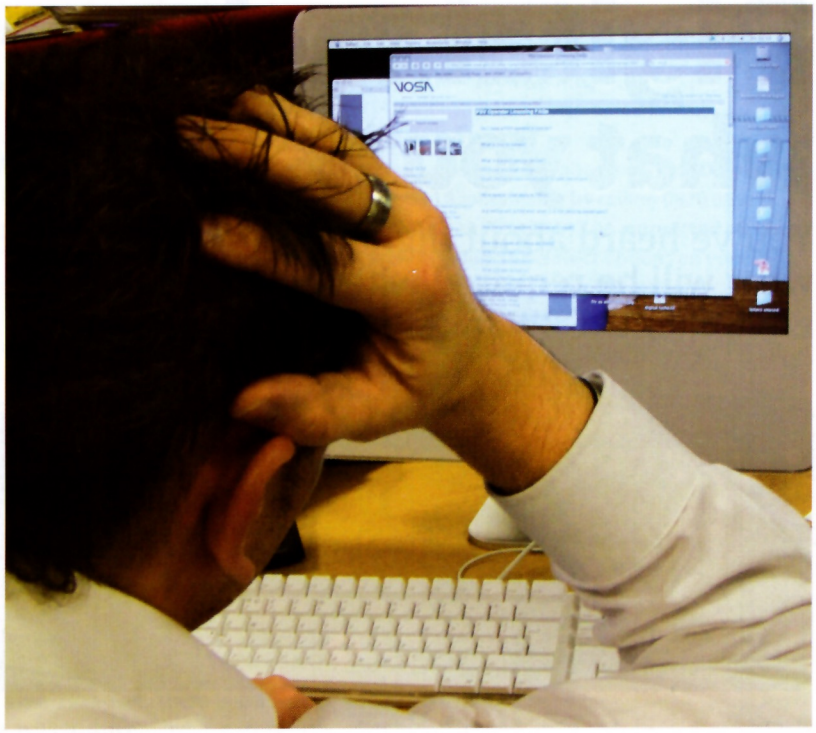
Tangled up in the web

Have you tried using the VOSA website? Archer has, and he's not impressed...



The VOSA website left Archer tearing his hair out

The VOSA website has the scope to be a splendidly useful resource for operators and Traffic Area Offices (TAOs) alike. Some parts of it still need a lot of hard work done on them before it can reach its full potential though.

The searchable, and publicly available, database of licence holders, for example, hasn't been put together consistently. Some sole traders are listed with their surname first, whilst others are listed with their forenames first. This means the only reliable way to search using a sole trader's surname is to sandwich it between two "wildcard" asterisks and hope for the best.

Also, many postcodes in it either have spaces where they shouldn't or no spaces at all where they should. Because of this a search based on postcode is little better than a lottery.

To test it, I tried two separate name searches involving limited companies. For the first I just entered "arriva" and only got two results. For the second I entered "arriva*" (thereby "wildcarding" it") and got a far more realistic 50. Try it yourself and then tell me how you think it happens; because I find it bizarre, since as far as I can discover, the names of all Arriva's subsidiaries begin with the word "Arriva" and include a space before the next word!

Away from the public gaze the more private "Operator Self Service Area" of the site is protected by password security on a par with an internet bank, which is praiseworthy, but also prevents too many people seeing the mess that exists inside.

The only publicly available bits of it are the on-line user guide, which is completely out of date in relation to the services now available in this area, and the Frequently Asked Questions - or FAQs - page (which makes the mistake of assuming everyone's a haulier).

For example, if you go to FAQs and click on the question "Do I have to return discs for removed vehicles?" the intriguing answer "If they have not been lost or destroyed, the traffic commissioners have said that discs must be returned. (To the relevant Traffic Area for the licence)" pops up. I wouldn't advise any PSV operator to do this, otherwise it could be misconstrued by your TAO as a request to reduce your vehicle authorisation, and instead of quite legitimately using the disc from the old vehicle you've just shed after the Christmas peak in part exchange for the shiny new one you're expecting at Easter you could find yourself filling in tons of forms and sending them heaps of bank statements just to get it back.

Once you're actually within the inner sanctum of the "Operator Self Service Area" things don't get much better either. You can do and see a lot of things there, but most of them are mystifying.

The "Business" field on your main self service screen will allow you to describe yourself as just about anything but a bus or coach operator. Instead it offers you a drop down menu of choices including "Skip Hire'! Now, I know what coaches look like after messy private hires, but surely VOSA are having a bit of a laugh here aren't they?

> **A search based on postcode is little better than a lottery**

If you've become fed up with not being able to find yourself when you do a database postcode search you can also edit your postcode to correct this. You then see a dialogue box which tells you that the proposed alteration to your licence will be placed before the Traffic Commissioner for approval and you will be advised of their decision as soon as possible.

I'm also told that trivial alterations like this trigger the issue of at least one fresh O-Licence document too.

Once you've got the extra discs you can then have the pleasure of using the VOSA website to change your house number and get a new licence to go with them!

Digital tachographs: what you need to know

You've heard about digital tachographs, but have you grasped what will be required when your first vehicle appears with the equipment? CBW takes a look at the basics

By Mark Williams, editor

The first and most important aspect of digital tachograph to remember is that it does not alter any of the current rules on driving hours or the Working Time rules.

Digital tachograph is simply a replacement for paper discs and other manual records, and in the long run, could provide better business management tools for operators. Most operators would prefer not to be operating a digital system without lengthy preparation. But soon, they may not have the choice.

All new coaches produced after late May will have no analogue tachograph option, and many manufacturers are already planning to build only with digital tachograph from early May onwards.

Some operators may see a digital tachograph before they expect to. Some minibuses are already appearing with digitach, even though there is no requirement for UK domestic vehicles under 7.5 tonnes to have tachograph fitted.

Additionally, it will not be permitted for new, replacement analogue tachographs to be fitted to post-1996 vehicles, over 12 tonnes, after the implementation date (when announced) and that means some older vehicles may be retrofitted. Where fitted on in-scope vehicles, digital tachographs must be used.

From the date you get even one digitach-equipped vehicle, you will need download equipment and training as a minimum, but although many operators are planning that, when this occurs, older vehicles in the fleet will be retrofitted, it may not be possible on some coaches. This will leave some operators running digital and analogue side by side, and having to devise systems which will integrate the driving record for both systems.

There's no doubt the digitach will enable fairly complex calculations of driving hours infringements to be completed almost at the roadside - the Police and VOSA being issued with a 'control' cards which gives access to both the VU and driver card data. On the face of it, enforcement is likely to improve, and for law-abiding operators, this is good news....

What you will need

- **A digital tachograph (VU) on in-scope vehicles**
- **Driver card for each driver**
- **Company card(s)**
- **Download equipment**
- **Training for drivers and office**
- **Analysis system (internal or agency)**

CBW would like to thank the FTA for use of its excellent Compliance Guide in compiling this digest. The FTA (*www.fta.co.uk*, tel: 08717 11 22 22) can supply the full guide, which includes sample schedules for planning digitach, and a variety of equipment to aid use of digital tachograph to its members. Further information can also be obtained from VOSA's website *www.digitaltachograph.gov.uk*

Truck operators have been planning digitach for some time. Now it's our turn...

Driver cards

Driver cards, which are valid for five years, are used to collect driving period data which is also held on the digital tachograph, now called the Vehicle Unit (VU).

The card has an embedded chip which stores up to 28 days' of data, and is overprinted with the driver's details including a picture and signature. It will be required for ALL drivers who work to European driving hours rules and, if a driver has one, must be carried at ALL times even if the driver is driving a vehicle with analogue tachograph at the time.

A digital tachograph will record ALL time it is driven without use of a driver card, and positive evidence that the vehicle was not being driven illegally will be required should this time be the subject of any VOSA inquiry.

As a rule, drivers who do not have a valid card in possession at the time of beginning work cannot drive. However, there is a 15-day period during which drivers who can prove they permanently lost or destroyed their card can drive under a temporary arrangement using printed data. The card must be reported stolen immediately, and the stolen card number will be logged on a European computer database.

It is absolutely essential that drivers guard their driver card as keenly as they would, for example, their passport. Operators should consider a disciplinary policy for drivers who persistently lose their card or arrive for work without it.

An operator CAN however apply for replacement a replacement card on a driver's behalf.

Applying for driver cards

Applications must be made at least 15 days in advance of being required, and can only be applied for by the driver. They can be applied for in advance with a delayed start date.

Applying will be easier and quicker if drivers have the photocard driving licence, as the picture and signature will already be held on a computer system, and there will be no need to send identification documents.

Operators need to set up a driver card monitoring system, noting the driver licence number, card issue number, expiry date of card.

This record can be used to order a replacement card, but this card will be sent to the driver's registered address, and as with the original, it will be the driver's property.

Driver cards will be required by fitters if they take any equipped vehicle on the road, in any circumstances where they would be required to use an analogue tachograph.

How much?

Driver cards are £38 each on first application, and £19 for replacements.

Where from?

Driver cards can be applied for with a Driver Pack, ST1A, obtainable by calling 0870 850 1074 (NI, 028 7034 1461), an automated service. Carefully select the correct options on your telephone keypad.

Company cards

Company cards are used to access vehicle units (VUs), ensuring the data held on the VU is secure and cannot be tampered with.

Company cards do not hold data. You will require sufficient cards to 'unlock' or 'lock' the VUs from which you will be regularly downloading driving data.

As with driver cards, you will need a company card monitoring system which shows the cards in your possession and the details on them, including a log of those issued and eligible to use them.

Typically, at each work location an operator will have multiple cards with identical serial numbers. These will match with details stored in the VUs preventing any data being downloaded by other cards, but each card will also be separately numbered for identification.

Applying for company cards

Company cards bearing the same number will be required for each location at which there is downloading, as cards with different serial numbers will not operate unassigned VUs. This may be a useful feature where operators have multiple depots. However, multiple company cards with the same number must be applied for at the same time. Further cards can be obtained at a later date.

How much?

Company cards cost £38 and replacement/ renewal £19.

Where from?

Company cards can be obtained by calling 0870 850 1074 (NI, 028 7034 1461) and following the instructions. The application form is D779B.

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Download equipment

There are a number of download systems available, and operators will need to select the most appropriate.

As a minimum, the system selected must be able to store at least 12 months of raw, non-analysed driving data from both vehicles and drivers. The VU itself can store at least 365 days' of data, and the driver card 28 days.

The FTA recommends that driver data is downloaded every 21 days at a minimum, and VU data is downloaded every three months. The data must be stored on a secure computer or server, mindful of the Data Protection Act.

The data is usually transferred by 'unlocking' the VU with the company card and transferring the data to a memory device, such as a memory card or memory stick. This is then used to carry the data to your download to your computer download system.

After downloading, the VU must then be 'locked' with the company card.

Analysis systems

Analysis systems are required to 'periodically' inspect tachograph records for compliance, and thus a system must be in place to perform these checks.

However, the system, or parts of it, can be a service run by a third party (as now) to analyse the tachograph record. Such systems can also be used to provide other useful data, such as compliance checking for Working Hours, calculating pay or other management tasks.

Because of the immense variation of possible uses, each operator needs to decide and budget for equipment that best suits the operation. For example, the capital cost of a complex software system may be higher over its operating life than third-party tachograph analysis for a very small fleet over the same period.

Training

The cost of training may be greater than many of the hardware and software costs of implementing a valid and operational digital tachograph system.

Planners, workshop managers, supervisors, trainers, drivers and office managers may all require training in the use of the VUs, the downloading systems, and any analysis equipment or software planned. Most of this training has to be complete before an effective digital tachograph system can work.

Calibration of digital tachographs can only be done by appointed testers

Vehicle Units

Among the most complex aspects of implementing digital systems could be the tachograph Vehicle Unit (VU) itself.

Understanding new hardware, whether a video recorder or washing machine, is never easy, and although manufacturers have tried to keep things simple, it is vital that drivers understand their VU fully.

A demonstration case from Siemens VDO

What's more, those operators seeking to retrofit VUs may find that it is not feasible; some vehicles may not be able to use the new units at all, and even more modern vehicles may have a combined tachograph/speedometer unit which cannot be directly swapped for the slim-line digital VU.

The VU does not require as many secure 'sealed' elements as an analogue unit - for example, the motion sensor does not need to be sealed to the cable - as the VU records all un-encrypted signals. Calibration can only be by approved agencies, and in addition to the programming of the vehicle registration into the VU, a plaque certifying the calibration must be fixed inside the vehicle.

Recalibration must be done every two years. If faults develop, the VU can detect these during self-diagnosis, but repair may not be economic as VUs are sealed, solid-state electronic units.

Operators may have said goodbye to tacho discs but the VU requires paper rolls instead.

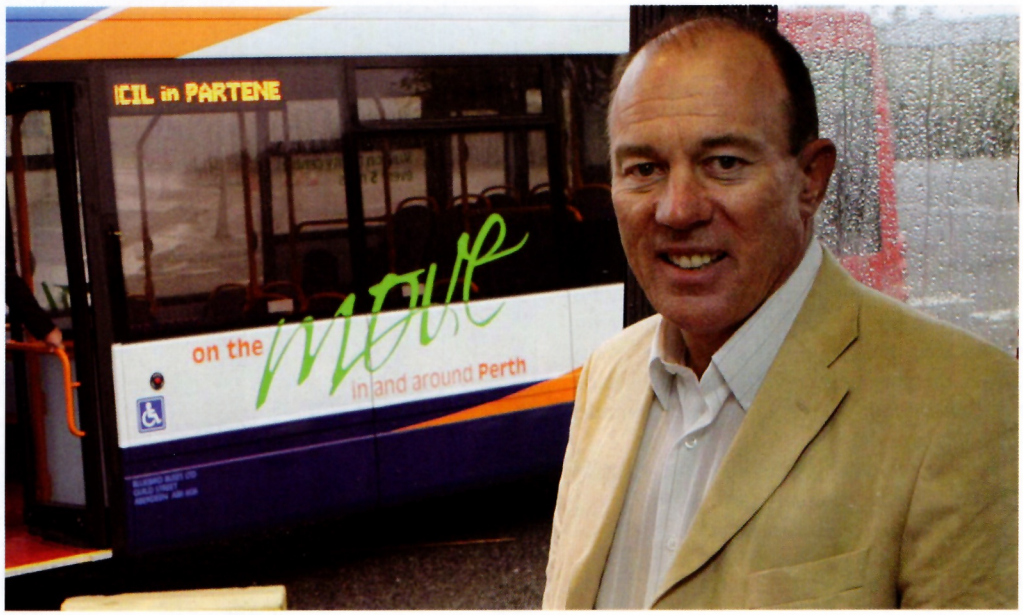
Where now for the buses?

News editor Andrew Peace finds out what kind of regulation some of the industry's key players would like to see happen

Speeches by the Secretary of State for Transport Alistair Darling MP - first of all in the House of Commons and then later at the CPT annual dinner (see pages 4-5) - may have superseded events at Landor Conference's 'Bus Regulation: Partnership, Contracts or a Third Way' conference last Thursday.

But with the minister only outlining his ideas for future reform of the regulatory system governing bus services in the UK, there may still be room for the breadth of ideas and views expressed at a very lively conference indeed.

Experts from all corners of the industry volunteered their views on whether bus regulation is a blind alley or yellow brick road.



Brian Souter

1. Bus industry regulation: Does anything need to change?

An overview of the current regulatory framework

Graham Stringer MP

Graham Stringer MP, the chief politician behind moves to re-regulate bus services, painted a damning picture of the current system. In his First-served constituency in Manchester he says the company has a, "simply appalling record of punctuality, reliability and quality of vehicles", and cites the 9,000 registration changes in the past four and a half years in Greater Manchester as evidence that the current system is not working. He says de-regulation has not even led to increased competition - in his area 26% of tendered services have only one application, and 82% of the market is controlled by three bus companies, "rarely competing on each other's routes."

Does the role of the traffic commissioner need to change?

Philip Brown, senior traffic commissioner

Whether the role of the traffic commissioners needs to change, says Brown, depends on what happens with quality contracts (over which TCs will have no influence). But if there is to be increased regulation then traffic commissioners are the ideal candidates to enforce the new system he says, as they are independent. What he does call for is consolidated legislation in the passenger transport industry, saying currently there are so many disparate parts that it is difficult enough for TCs to understand.

> Roger French believes that regulation stifles innovation – the lifeblood of growing patronage on bus services

Is the regulatory scheme working?

Brian Souter, Stagecoach chief executive

Souter kicked off proceedings by saying his company would not be taking part in SYPTE's quality contract consultation. That he believes in markets should come as a surprise to nobody - he says he is "looking forward to a wonderful market opportunity in Sheffield" as Stagecoach enters the region via its recent acquisition of Yorkshire Traction. He predicts the upcoming network revision there will "provide everybody with an alternative to a quality contract". He disputes accusations anti-competitive behaviour in the industry saying competition in South Manchester and Oxford has been very good for passengers. He also calls on traffic commissioners to not accept packages of registrations from failing operators - where it involves over 50 vehicles he says he will step in and "prove that the market can work".

2. Can quality partnership schemes deliver?

Innovation rather than regulation

Roger French, managing director, Brighton and Hove Bus Company

Roger French believes that regulation stifles innovation - the lifeblood of growing patronage on bus services. His company is often cited as the success story of deregulation, having grown ridership by 5% over the last twelve years. Only 2% of services are funded and the only deregistrations have been down to the - very pro-public transport - local authority. He says there has been a massive cultural shift away from regulation during the last two decades, and points to the absurdity of a government now regulating services like telecommunications, or a local authority telling Marks and Spencer what types of bread to sell, and at

what price. He thinks the bus industry is no different.

Dundee – delivering better buses through partnership

Neil Gellatly, team leader for sustainable transport, Dundee City Council

Travel Dundee is another deregulation success story. The company has the fourth highest margin in the country - 18.5% - and ridership has grown by 10% on some routes. Gellatly says this is down to a strong partnership with his local authority due, in part, to the stability at the top of his organisation and a determination on both sides to have a good bus service in the city. Bus subsidy is less than £500k per annum.

Handling public transport in a de-regulated market

Basil Jackson, head of passenger transport, Cambridgeshire County Council

Jackson says that whether to regulate or not is not a question for operators, it is a question for government. He calls operators enablers, and says "we have to make sure we deliver in the environment and with the tools we have." He says regulation does not guarantee success, as deregulation does not either - what matters is the strength of the relationships you develop with your partners. In this sense, if you have to have a contract you have failed already, like a marriage without trust. Never mind the third way he says, have we really explored the first and the second way?

3. Is greater regulation the way forward?

Further reform of regulation

John Hibbs, emeritus professor of transport management, University of Central England

If there is reform of the regulatory system, Professor Hibbs argues that it should be further relaxed. He is not happy with the current 'appropriate financial standing' regulation saying it is a barrier to entry and expansion in the market, and says Parish Councils should be given powers to raise a small rate to subsidise local bus services. He says Quality Contracts are a threat to commercial freedom and that they should be removed

Phillip Bown

If there is reform of the regulatory system, Professor John Hibbs argues that it should be further relaxed

form the statute book. He says they "replace competition in the market with competition for the market" which is, in his opinion, "nonsense and illogical".

Can operators work successfully in a regulatory environment?

Francois-Xavier Perin, chief executive, Transdev plc

Perin began his speech by saying that his company, international operator Transdev, does 90% of its business in markets with various types of regulation. He says operators need to concentrate on delivering quality, and what they need for that is partnerships and shared values with local authorities - in terms of vision, planning, infrastructure and integration of services. He says strong partnerships are not mutually exclusive with regulated systems - but that where partnerships do not exist his company will not do business, regulated or not. He says regulation should not mean a lack of flexibility, nor uniformity.

Delivering better buses outside the mets: do we need more regulation?

John Hodgkins, transport and accessibility manager, Buckinghamshire County Council and ATCO chairman

A qualified yes says Hodgkins - pointing to the fact that revenue support from local authorities in non-metropolitan areas has increased by 121% in the last 10 years, and that wholly supported services have grown from 21% to 25% in 5 years - as opposed to around 12.5% in metros. Only 25% of services in non-mets are wholly commercial. But he does not want to rule out competition where it benefits passengers, and calls for an independent role for traffic commissioners. He wants a "tool kit, with teeth, that works effectively for LAs and bus operators working in a spirit of partnership".

4. Is there a third way?

Future Regulatory Models

Brian Cox, independent consultant

Cox points out that the deregulated system can be bad for passengers and that the regulated system can be bad for operators. He proposes "commercial contracts", where track/ station access is guaranteed; where highway/ parking policies and management are quantified; as are service levels/ coverage and fare levels/ types; that there is allowance for external factors and a role for reformed traffic commissioners. Most importantly he says there should be flexibility, which includes the need for mutually agreed changes. Cox also calls for the abolition of the OFT, saying, "it does nothing at all except get in everybody's way".

London is the third way

Tony Grayling, associate director, The Institute for Public Policy Research

Influential left wing thinker Grayling says the Transport for London model has long been proven the best way to organise transport services and that we should stop wasting time and introduce it around the rest of the country. He says it provides the best balance between service and cost. His criticism is that TfL contracts are too long at five years - he says research has proved the optimum length is three years. He says even five year contracts mean there is more competition in London than anywhere else. He calls for integrated regional transport bodies created out of expanded PTEs, and the sooner the better. He says the question of cost is ultimately down to choice.

The future of regulation

Peter Huntley, director, TAS Partnership

Huntley says the current regime may not have arrested declining bus use over the last 25 years, but it has not accelerated it either - therefore the regulatory system is not critical, he suggests, in terms of patronage. But, he says some stakeholders and users have become alienated from the system and that it may have allowed poor operators in, so some change is needed. He discounts the TfL model as too expensive. His solution is to give TCs more power and introduce a system where PTEs are given incremental power over failing operators. He added that the CPT refusing to be involved in quality contracts though was sending a signal that they are scared of the debate.

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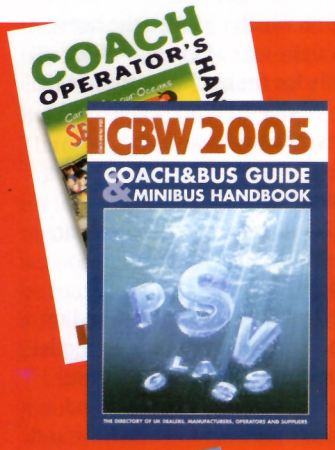

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Volvo's Liberian peace mission

Swedish manufacturer builds unique bus for UN armed forces

VOLVO Trucks has built a unique bus based on a Volvo truck chassis for use by the Swedish UN peace-keeping armed forces currently based in Liberia, West Africa.

The FMV (Swedish Defence Material Administration) awarded the contract to Volvo Trucks following the customary EU negotiations.

It is based on a standard Volvo FM9 4x4 chassis with superstructure produced by Swedish bodybuilder, Helmark.

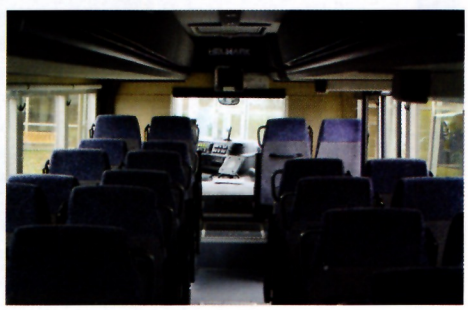
The bus is designed to carry 40 passengers and will be used primarily by UN soldiers in Liberia. It will also be possible to use the bus to evacuate local inhabitants, should the need arise in times of unrest.

"This is an all-Swedish production and the Volvo chassis is based exclusively on standard Swedish components," says Leif Johansson, head of military vehicle sales at Volvo Trucks, Nordic Region. "As a result, it will be possible for service and maintenance to be handled by our own service network, no matter where in the world the vehicles are used."

A specific requirement was for the vehicle to be capable of driving on roads damaged by war in really rough conditions, so good ground clearance and manoeuvrability were paramount. In addition all vulnerable external areas - like headlights and indicators - are protected with metal grilles.

For passenger safety, the windows are made of a composite material containing a layer of polycarbonate, which must be able to withstand both stone throwing or attack by light firearms.

The Swedish armed forces have initially ordered four of these special vehicles, with an option on a further six. The first bus is now ready for delivery.



The interior of the Volvo Peace bus

The unique bus built by Volvo Trucks for the Swedish UN peace-keeping forces in Liberia

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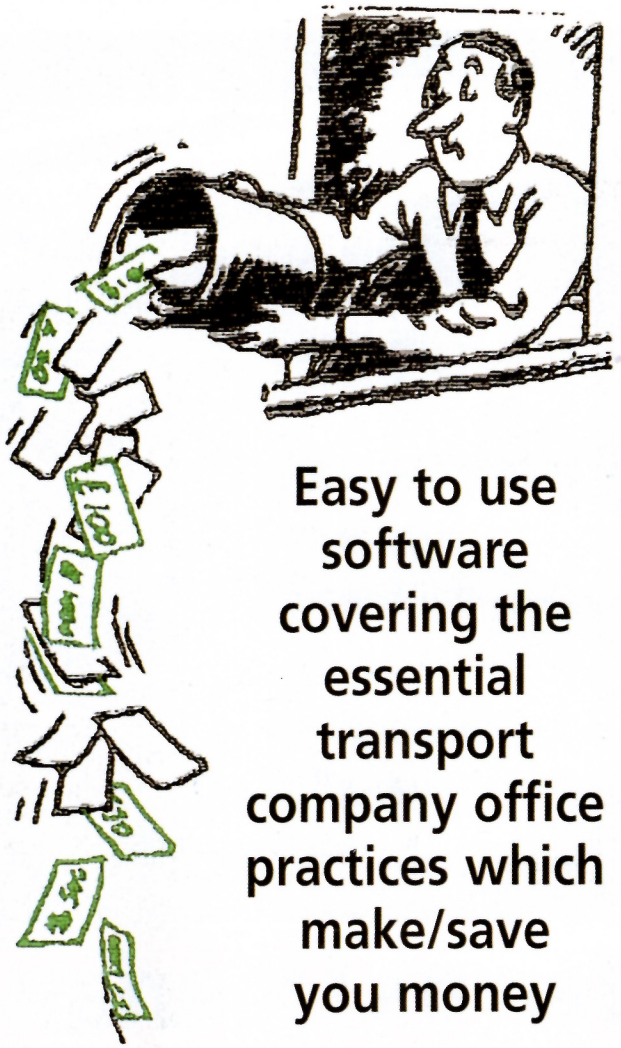

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FACT FILE

Operator: Arriva North West and Wales
Chassis: Volvo B7TL
Body: ADL ALX400
Engine: Volvo D7C
Transmission: ZF Auto
Seats: 72
Spec: CCTV
Supplier: Volvo Bus

ARRIVA NORTH WEST AND WALES

ARRIVA's response to more talk from Merseytravel about the state of bus services in Liverpool (see *CBW*, January 26) is to unveil a fleet of 30 shiny new East Lancs bodied- Volvo B7TLs. In addition, Arriva has pledged to spend £45m on creating a network of easy-access buses in Merseyside by 2011.

The vehicles will be used on two routes in the city, one of which, the 82A/N is Liverpool's first ever 24 hour bus service.

Bob Hind, managing director of Arriva North West and Wales, said: "Two years ago, we launched the Le bus network, promising high-frequency services on high-quality, easy-access buses. The work we have achieved so far, improving and adding to the network, will continue - and these new vehicles form a major step in this process."

The buses - all low-floor easy-access and featuring CCTV cameras - went into service this week. Nearby Arriva North West and Wales also recently invested just over £4million on 39 brand new deckers for its Runcorn and Widnes network. Last year, Arriva bought more than 100 new Volvo buses across England, out of a total fleet of around 6,000 of all types.

METROLINE

METROLINE has invested £4.3m in a fleet of Alexander Dennis Enviro 400 deckers for use on its TfL-contracted route 24.

As per TfL requirements, all the buses are equipped with on-board CCTV, tinted glass, automatic heating system, wheelchair ramp and front 'kneeling' system.

"Alexander Dennis was able to put together a package which offered our company the best value for money - high quality vehicles at a competitive price," says newly appointed Metroline chief operating officer Sean O'Shea. "We already have a large number of Alexander Dennis vehicles in service and we are very pleased with their performance."

Metroline also cite the fact that the Enviro 400 holds up to nine more passengers on its lower deck than comparable buses as a major factor behind its decision. All 28 vehicles will be allocated to the company's Holloway Garage in North London, five of which are already up and running. The remainder will be delivered by mid-February.

FACT FILE

Operator: Metroline
Chassis: ADL Enviro 400 **Body:** Enviro 400
Engine: Cummins ISCE Euro III
Transmission: ZF auto
Seats: 78 **Spec:** CCTV, tinted windows, automatic heating **Supplier:** Alexander Dennis

FACT FILE

Operator: Weardale Motor Services
Chassis: Mercedes-Benz Vario 0814D
Body: Plaxton Cheetah
Engine: OM904LA 136bhp
Transmission: 5-speed manual
Spec: DVD, marker lights
Supplier: Plaxton

WEARDALE MOTOR SERVICES

RATHER than provide small groups with a full-size coach - increasingly uneconomic as the price of fuel continues to rise - Weardale Motor Services in County Durham will now be able to supply them with a tailor-made vehicle. The company has just taken delivery of a 33-seat Plaxton Cheetah.

It's the company's first Cheetah, and its first midicoach for two years, but not its first Plaxton - Weardale already numbers a Panther, a Prima and a rare Excalibur B12T among its 22 strong fleet.

"We have been without a 33-seater in our fleet for the last two years," explains Anthony Gibson of Weardale. "The rising price of fuel makes it increasingly expensive to provide small groups with a big coach, when we can transport people in comfort in a compact vehicle with considerably lower fuel bills.

"We have had good experience of Plaxton products over many years, and when it came to buying a small coach the Cheetah was the obvious choice."

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

MAHA offers turnkey soultions

Workshop equipment specialist MAHA UK has been expanding its services since the appointment of Neil Ebbs in 2004 as project manager.

The company's project team has increased to meet the growth in demand for rolling road brake testers, lifts, pit jacks and test lanes.

With over 350 commercial vehicle brake testers installed in workshops across the country, MAHA is now offering a turnkey solution - developing complete workshops from green or brownfield sites.

MAHA hopes to take the worry out of setting up workshops

This includes taking all of the worry out of designing, planning, gaining VOSA approval, (if needed), installing and training on equipment for new or refurbished repair workshops anywhere in the UK.

MAHA manufactures all its own products and nothing is re-badged. MD Gus Gregory believes this approach means all MAHA's engineers have the correct tools, spares, technical information and factory back-up.

■ Details from Gus Gregory, MAHA UK Limited, Tel: 01945 476663, Fax: 01945 476664.

Carlyle says its catalogue is the most comprehensive PSV bodies publication on the market

Carlyle launches body fittings catalogue

Carlyle Bus & Coach has launched its new 'Bodyfittings Catalogue' in perfect-bound, 204 page form.

The company says it provides an invaluable reference manual to body fittings and believes it is the most comprehensive publication available which relates to coach, bus and minibus bodies. It covers parts on all makes and should be a useful guide for all vehicle operators, builders, repairers and converters.

Carlyle's Steve Dunn said: "This is the first time we have produced a definitive bodyfittings catalogue in such depth. It was put together by the Carlyle team from original equipment manufacturers around the world. The information is displayed for fast, easy reference in 11 colour coded sections with each part having a photograph, detailed dimensional line drawing and an individual part number.

Typical inclusions are: handles, locks, hinges, gas struts, toilet and servery components.

Carlyle carries a dedicated stock of over 20,000 parts - including vehicle glass and is one of the largest stock holdings in Europe. It has a fleet of delivery vehicles operating from its central hub in the West Midlands and from regional branches.

■ Catalogues are available through branches or contact Steve Dunn, Carlyle Bus & Coach Ltd, Carlyle Business Park, Great Bridge Street, Swan Village, West Bromwich B70 OXA. Tel: 0121 524 7403; e-mail *stevedunn@carlyleplc.co.uk*

Alfdex's oil mist separator will be used in a number of engines based on DaimlerChrysler's Euro IV and V platforms

DaimlerChrysler chooses Alfdex

DaimerChrysler has signed a development co-operation and supply agreement for an oil mist separator from Alfdex AB.

Swedish manufacturer Alfdex is jointly owned by Alfa Laval and Haldex and the deal is worth £18.6m over five years with serial deliveries expected to commence around the end of 2006.

Choice of the Alfdex system is based on renowned centrifugal separation technology from Alfdex combined with the strong marketing position of Haldex within the automotive industry. It is said to offer a highly efficient method of removing oil droplets and soot particles from the ventilation air in diesel engine crankcases. It will be incorporated into a number of engines based on DaimlerChrysler's Euro IV and Euro V platforms. It covers engines produced by Mercedes-Benz, Detroit Diesel and Mitsubishi Fuso.

Alfdex has already reached similar agreements with Volvo and Scania and tests with other manufacturers are ongoing.

■ Details: *www.haldex.com* or *www.alfalaval.com*

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TENDERS

SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

TENDER NOTICE

ZMC 001 – THE SUPPLY AND DELIVERY OF LOW FLOOR WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE BUSES

The County Council has an initial requirement for the supply and delivery of 2 low floor wheelchair accessible buses. The vehicles should have a seating capacity of between 31 to 33 seats together with a space for one wheelchair. The vehicle engine should meet Euro 3 Emission standards.

Additionally, the successful tenderer may be required to supply further similar specification vehicles for a period of up to 4 years commencing 1 May 2006. No guarantee however can be given in relation to the quantity of vehicles that will be required which will be dependant on budget and operational requirements.

The County Council also reserves the right for other Local Government Authorities' Bodies and Agencies to adopt and use this framework.

Enterprises wishing to be considered for inclusion in the tender process, must send a written request for a tender pack to, Nigel Denton, Procurement Manager, Shropshire County Council, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, SHREWSBURY SY2 6ND (fax number 01743 255901 email: nigel.denton@shropshire-cc.gov.uk) quoting reference ZMC 001.

The deadline for the return of completed tenders is noon 27 March 2006.

A separate contract notice has been placed in the Official Journal of the European Union in accordance with the provisions for the EU Public Procurement Directive 2004/18/EC.

Shropshire County Council

Events

FEBRUARY

13-16: CPT London Home Counties Study Tour to the Netherlands, with Bova and Berkhof, Eindhoven and Maastricht. Members only. Sponsored by P&O Ferries and VVV Maastricht. Fax Ling Tang, CPT, 0207 240 6565 for details

28: Use of Bio Fuels in Transport, CBI Conference Centre, London. Address by Minister for Transport Dr Stephen Ladyman. 0207 787 1210, *www.thewaterfront.co.uk*

28: Reducing Crime on Public Transport Conference, Earls Court One, London. CBW media partner. Contact 020 7324 4330, *www.neilstewartassociates.com/li226* for registration, or fax 0207 490 8830

MARCH

1-2: British Travel Trade Fair, NEC Birmingham. *www.britishtraveltradefair.com*

8-9: Moving On Conference, Crown Plaza Hotel, Glasgow, *www.moving-on-conference.co.uk*, or tel: 0191 241 4523

9: Transport and Economic Development in Wales, Marriott Hotel, Cardiff. 0207 787 1210, *www.thewaterfront.co.uk*

14-16: International Road Transport Union 30th World Congress, Dubai World Trade Centre. *www.iru.org*

15: CPT London and Home Counties Discussion Evening, Army and Navy Club, Pall Mall. Speakers include Phil White, CPT President/NEG. CPT members only. Ling Tang on 0207 240 3131

APRIL

4: London Transport Awards Dinner, London Hilton. 01224 263134

6-7: 30th UK Transport Conference and Exhibition:'Wasted Miles, Wasted Money'. University of Nottingham. Phone CICC: 01223 881622 or *annchapman@CICC-conferences.org.uk*

7-9: Coach Tourism Council/ Bonded Coach Holidays Conference 2006, Llandudno, North Wales. 0870 850 2839 or email *admin@coachtourismcouncil.co.uk*

24-26: CPT Scotland Annual Conference, Gleneagles. Gail Hume 0131 272 2150, email: *gailhume@cpt-uk.freeserve.co.uk*

25-27: CV Show, NEC, Birmingham

MAY

8-10: ALBUM Conference, Cardiff. Details: Karen Stafford-Smith 029 2078 7700.

9-13: Motortec automotive show, IFEMA, Madrid, Spain. *www.motorteconline.com*, +34 91 722 3000

21-28: CPT Study Tour 2006, Singapore/Kuala Lumpur. Details on 0207 240 3131

OCTOBER

10-12: CTA National Community & Voluntary Transport Event, G-Mex Centre, Manchester. *www.communitytransport.com*, or call 0870 774 3586

NOVEMBER

7-9: Euro Bus Expo, NEC. 0870 224 8619, *eurobusxpo@expom.co.uk*

14-17: FIAA '06 Exhibition (bus and coach), Madrid, Spain. +34 91 722 5000, *www.ifema.es/ferias/fiaa/default.html*

24 - 25: Coach and Bus Show 2006, RDS, Dublin, Ireland. Visit the website at *www.cttc.ie*, or email *c.collins.cttc@iol.ie*

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British Travel Trade Fair would like to thank Redwing Coaches for their help and contribution to this years' creative theme.

Two minute interview

Full name: Ian Hall
Age: 52
Occupation: Director, BASE
What shape is the coach and bus industry in?: We are in a transitional period. Only the strongest and best-managed will survive
Who, if anyone, will always be remembered for their contribution to the industry, and why?: The late Stuart Appleby. For helping to found a body to represent the industry's interests, and for always giving

a sound and honest opinion to a question
What was the proudest moment in your working life?: Probably Coach and Bus Live last November and the realisation that we have taken BASE Ltd from absolutely nothing to a £7m turnover in four years
Who, whether alive or dead, fictional or real, would you like to have as passengers on a long journey? They're all alive, and every year I get a long journey with them. They're my industry friends and they all come on our annual motorcycle trip
And where would you most like to be heading?: Anywhere with good roads, sun and good food; this year probably Galicia and Northern Portugal

ON THE MOVE...

GoSkills, the sector skills council for the passenger transport industry has appointed **Nick Mitchell** as director. He will combine his new position with his day job as Go-Ahead Rail Group HR Director.

He said: "I see my appointment to the GoSkills Board as an exciting opportunity to make a positive contribution to the skills agenda in the passenger transport sector."

Andrew Jones, who joined JMP Consulting as a divisional director late last year, has now taken charge of the transport consultancy's new Bristol office and is in the process of recruiting a team of transport planners and engineers.

Nick Mitchell

Dr Adrian Davis

The latest to join the team is associate **Dr Adrian Davies**, a specialist in transport and health impact issues. He has run his own business for the past 11 years and has 20 years experience in transport and health.

The reign of Wayne

Stagecoach in Warwickshire has just welcomed a new operations manager to the Rugby depot.

Wayne Simpson, 43 began his career within the bus industry in 2001 following a decision to change his career after 20 years working in the hotel and catering industry.

Starting as a driver in his home town of Preston, he worked his way up the ranks after being accepted on Stagecoach's Staff Development Programme.

Wayne Simpson

Wayne said: "I'm loving my new position, it's a great challenge but I'm up for it. I look after the day-to-day running of the bus services in Rugby and I want to make sure the service offered to the people of Rugby is the best it can be."

Wayne is keen get involved in local developments and believes it is key for Stagecoach to play an integral role to ensure customer needs are met.

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